

FROM A FAT MAN...to a HE-MAN...in 10 MINUTES!

"I REDUCED MY WAIST 8 INCHES"

WRITES
GEORGE BAILEY

"I lost 50 pounds" says W. T. Anderson. "My waist is 8 inches smaller" writes W. L. McGinnis. "Felt like a new man" claims Fred Wolf. "Wouldn't sell my belt for \$100" writes C. W. Higbee.

ACTUAL PHOTOGRAPHS SHOWING THE IMMEDIATE IMPROVEMENT IN APPEARANCE



1. "I was just a fat man with a protruding stomach... ill at ease and clumsy—no pep to do anything!"



2. "I was ashamed to undress in the locker room—my friends poked fun at me and I had no answer!"



3. "Then I slipped on a Weil Belt...a transformation took place... what a difference—pounds seemed to have fallen away!"



4. "My friends were astonished!... I looked better—my clothes fitted me—and I felt like a million dollars!"

We are so sure that you will reduce your waistline at least *three* inches that we want you to . .

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We GUARANTEE to REDUCE your WAIST THREE INCHES IN TEN DAYS . . .

. . . . or it won't cost you one cent even the postage will be refunded!

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GREATLY IMPROVES YOUR APPEARANCE!

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It supports the sagging muscles of the abdomen and quickly gives an erect, athletic carriage.

Don't be embarrassed any longer with that "corporation" for in a short time, only the admiring comments of your friends will remind you that you once had a bulging waistline.

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You will be completely comfortable and entirely unaware that its constant gentle pressure is working constantly while you walk, work or sit . . . its message-like action gently but persistently eliminating fat with every move you make.

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DON'T WAIT—FAT IS DANGEROUS!

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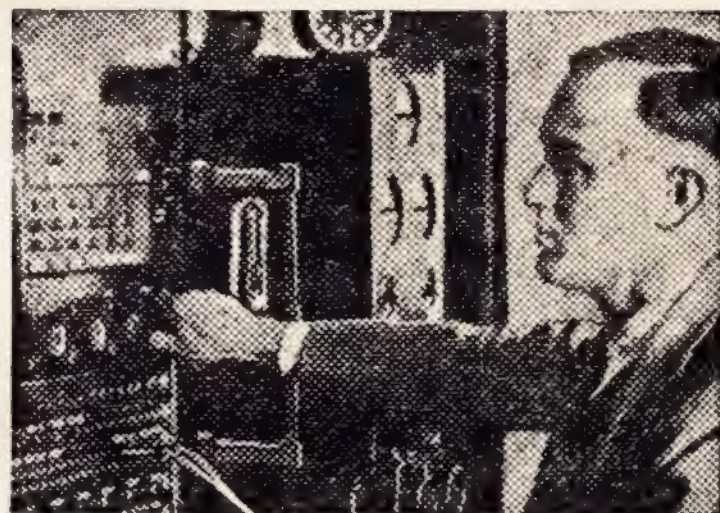
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DRAGON
of **KAO TSU**
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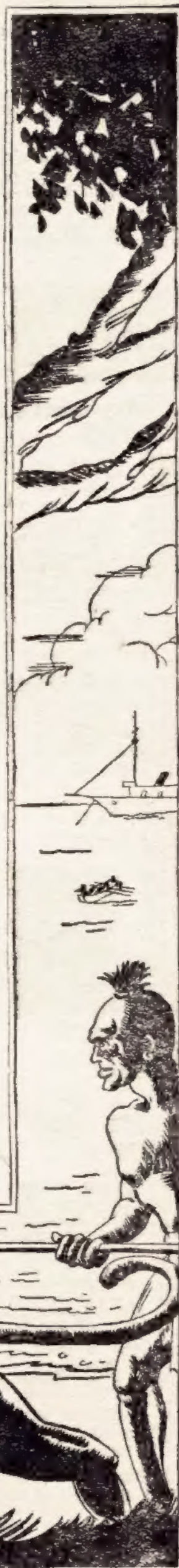
September, 1936

Vol. 4, No. 6

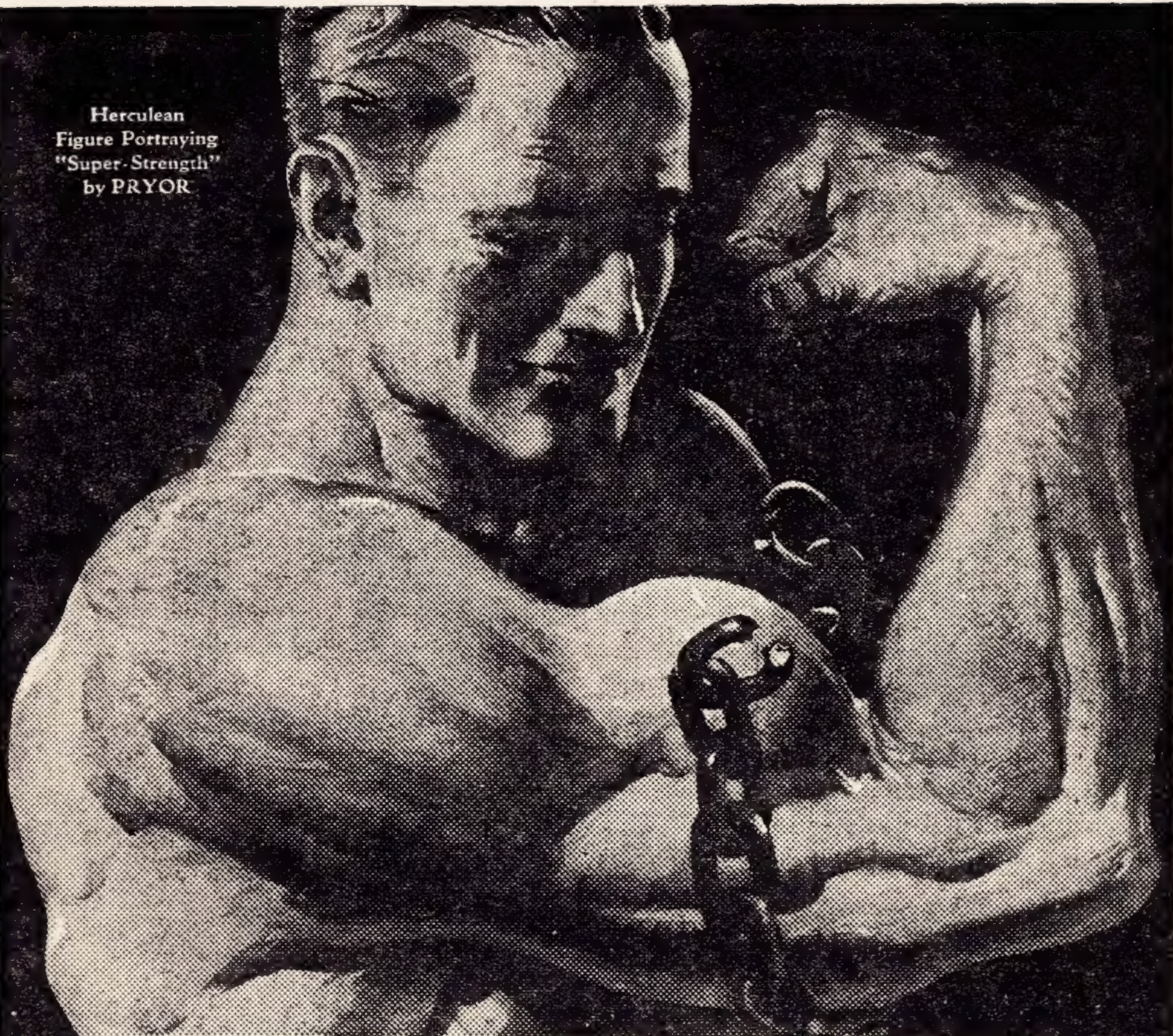
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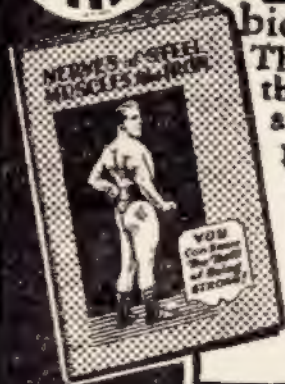
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The DRAGON

of KAO TSU

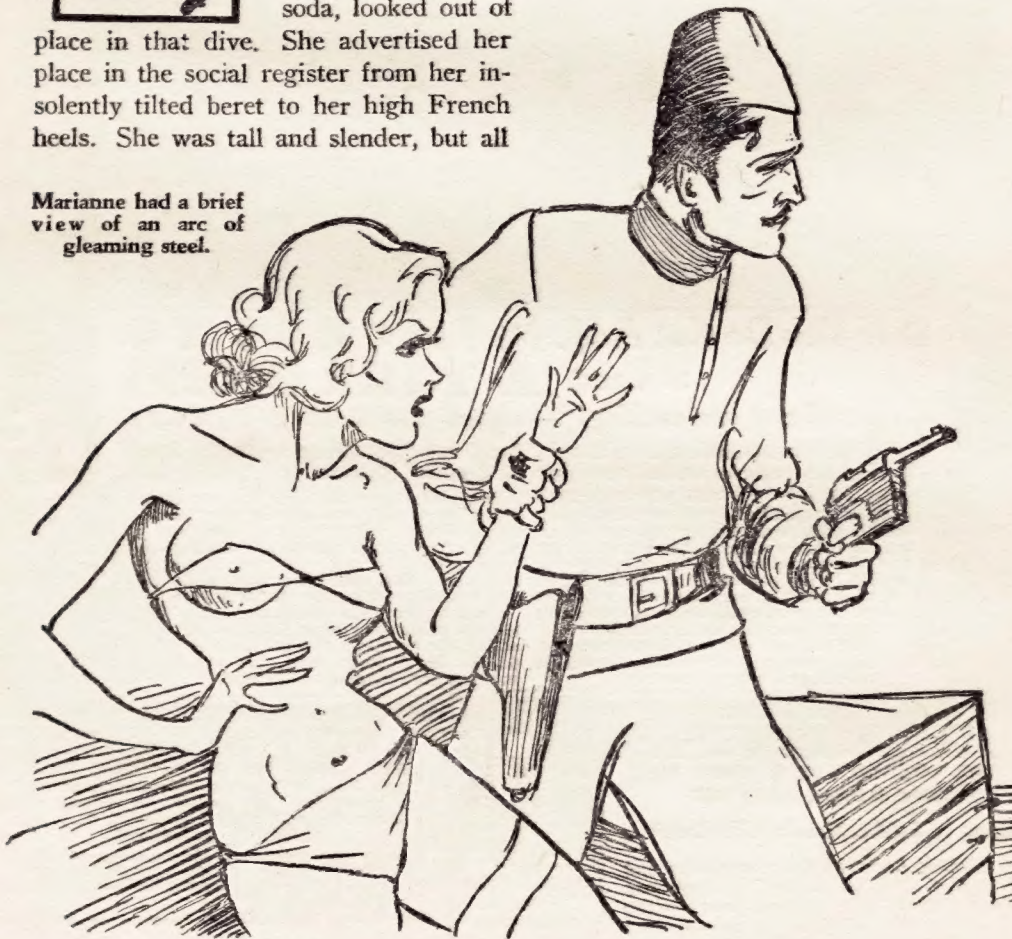
She came from high society and she should have known she had no business associating with a gorilla like Wild Bill Clanton. However, the job she wanted done was plain burglary, and her code of honor wouldn't let her turn thief!



HE girl who stormed the back room of the Purple Dragon Bar where Wild Bill Clanton sat sipping a whiskey-and-soda, looked out of place in that dive. She advertised her place in the social register from her insolently tilted beret to her high French heels. She was tall and slender, but all

her lines were supple and rounded, with melting curves that would make any man's blood run faster. Just now her purplish eyes flashed and her pertly-tilted breasts swelled stormily.

Marianne had a brief view of an arc of gleaming steel.

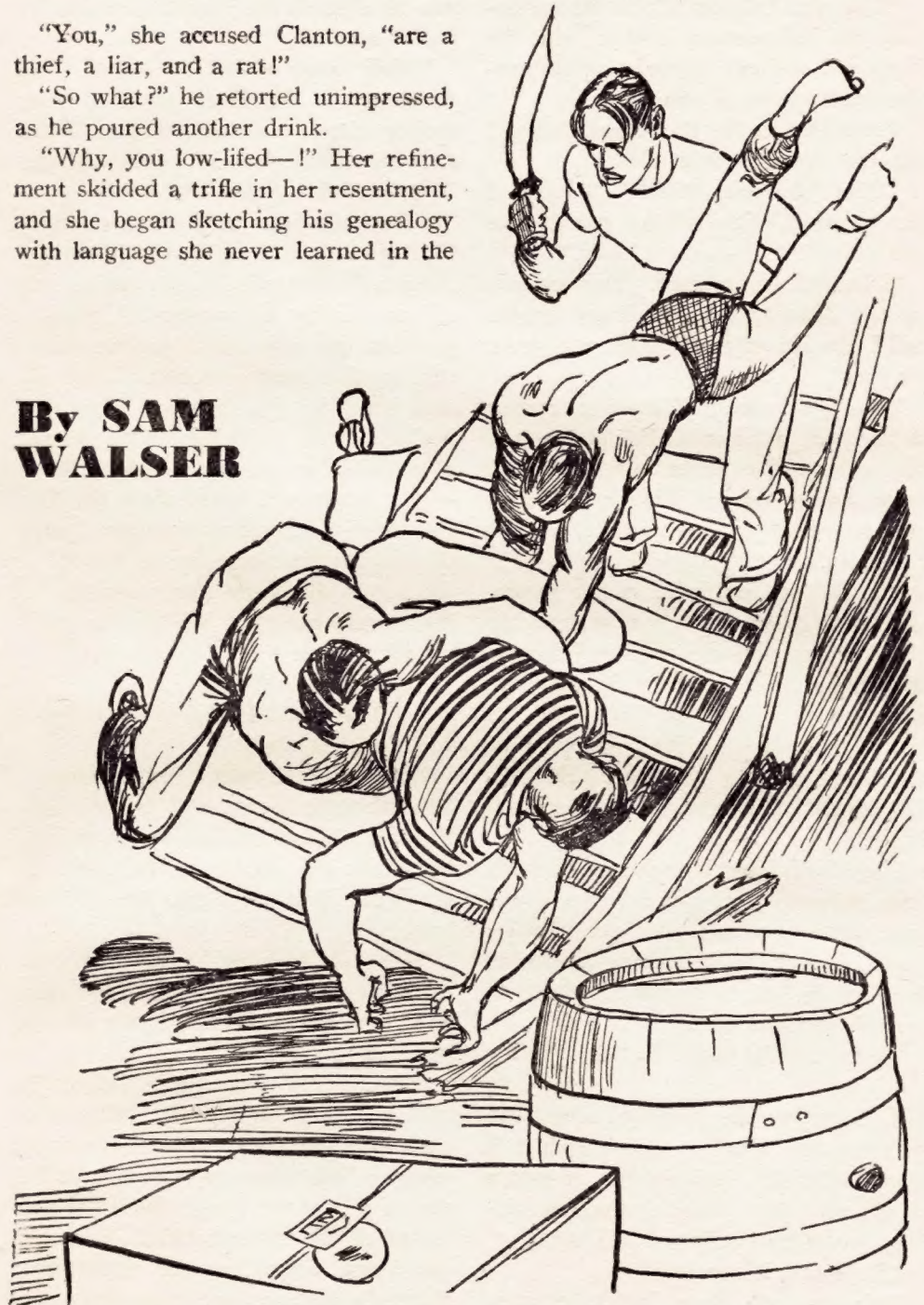


"You," she accused Clanton, "are a thief, a liar, and a rat!"

"So what?" he retorted unimpressed, as he poured another drink.

"Why, you low-lifed—I!" Her refinement skidded a trifle in her resentment, and she began sketching his genealogy with language she never learned in the

By SAM WALSER



Junior League. He interrupted her peremptorily.

"Now you hold on! Some things nobody can call me, not even a lady! Sit down and cool off before somethin' unpleasant happens to you!"

She wilted at the threat and drooped into the chair opposite him.

"This," she said bitterly, "is what I get for associating with a gorilla like you. Why I do it, I don't know."

"I know," he retorted. "Because you wanted Shareef Ahmed's ivory dragon and I was the only man who could get it for you."

"Yes, you were!" There was rancor in her tone, and her basilisk glare made him uneasy. You never could tell about these society dames! If she yanked a knife out of her garter, he meant to smack her down.

But she had no knife in her garter, as he could tell when she crossed her silk-clad legs with the regal indifference of a true aristocrat. She twitched down her skirt an inch or so, but not before he had a glimpse of white skin that made the blood boil to his head. Her indifference to his emotions was maddening.

Probably it had never occurred to Old Man Allison's pampered daughter Marianne that a man on Clanton's social plane would even think of making a pass at her, but he had to clench his hands to keep them off of her.

"What's eatin' you?" he demanded.

FOR answer she produced something from her handbag and smacked it down accusingly before him. It was a small, pot-bellied ivory dragon, exquisitely carved and yellowed with age.

"It's a fake!" she declared.

"It's the one Ram Lal stole from Shareef Ahmed," he asserted.

"It's a fake," she contended moodily. "Either you've gyped me, or that babu you hired to do the job has, or Ahmed's fooled us all."

"Well, what of it?" he asked. "All you want it for is to show to your society friends back in the United States and brag about it bein' a rare antique. They won't know the difference."

"Some of them will," she answered, lighting a cigarette with an injured air. "The collection of Oriental antiques is a great hobby in my set. It's been a game to see who could get the rarest relic by fair means or foul. Betty Elston got hold of a priceless Ming vase in Canton, and she's gloated over the rest of us until I've wanted to kick her little—well, anyway, I heard about the Kao Tsu dragon in San Francisco, and I came all the way to Singapore to get it. It dates from the Early Han Dynasty, and it's the only one of its kind in the world. I knew Ahmed wouldn't sell it, so I hired you to have it stolen for me."

Clanton picked up the yellowed figure and turned it about.

"I dunno," he mused. "Ram Lal got into Ahmed's house and swiped this. He's the slickest thief on the Peninsula. But if it's the wrong one, he might be afraid to risk another try. Ahmed's bad business."

"But he's been paid, and it isn't the right dragon!" she snapped. "What kind of a man would he be to take money under false pretences?"

"Hire a thief and then squawk if he gyps you!" he mocked her. "But keep your shirt on. I'm a man of my word, anyway. I've taken your dough, and I aim to deliver the goods. Ram Lal's so scared of Ahmed he's hidin' in an old warehouse down on the waterfront. Maybe he just got the wrong dragon by mistake. Or he may be holdin' out on

us for more dough. You leave this thing with me, and tonight I'll go down there and talk to him. If he's on the level, maybe he'll try again. If he's tryin' to put somethin' over, well, we'll see."

"I'm going with you," she decided. "I don't trust either of you."

"It's no place for a white woman," he warned her.

She tilted a scornful nose.

"I can take care of myself, *Mister* Clanton—otherwise I'd never have dared to have any dealings with you! I'll pick you up near the mosque on Muscat Street. And I don't want to have to drag you out from under some table, or away from some brown-skinned wench, either."

"I'll be there, sober and respectable," he assured her. "But how about a little drink before you go?"

"No, thanks!" she declined. "I prefer to keep our relationship on a strictly business basis; and whiskey gives men ideas. I'll see you at dusk."

And she swung out of the room with a long-legged, hip-swaying gait that made Clanton moan with despair and grab the whiskey bottle. She had him buffaloed. If she'd been anybody else, he'd have made a pass at her, regardless. But there was a limit even to his audacity, and he didn't dare try any rough stuff on the daughter of Old Man Allison, millionaire and woolly wolf of finance that the old devil was.

He turned the ivory dragon about in his hands and frowned.

"Antique collectin', eh? Hokum!"

RISING, he bellowed to a half-caste waiter, plunked a coin on the table and barged out of a side door. A few moments later he was seated in a silk shop kept by one Yakub, an old Jew who had a finger in many enterprises be-

sides the one advertised by the sign over his door, and whose ear was always close to the mysterious pulse of the East. Clanton set the ivory dragon before him and demanded: "What's that?"

Yakub donned square, steel-rimmed spectacles, and regarded it.

"That's the Kao Tsu dragon," he said. "But I wouldn't handle it for you. You must have stolen it from Shareef Ahmed. I love life too much to handle anything stolen from that devil."

"It's a fake," asserted Clanton.

"If it's a fake, I'm a Gentile," answered old Yakub, lovingly fondling its smooth surface. "Tchk, tchk! Such a pity! I'd buy it myself if I weren't afraid of Ahmed. He'll slit your throat for this, sure."

"You'll swear it's genuine?" Clanton demanded.

"My head on it!" The old man's sincerity was convincing.

"Hmmm!" Clanton's scowl deepened. "I wonder what that hussy's tryin' to put over?"

Then he asked Yakub a strange question, and received a stranger answer.

IF MARIANNE Allison had known of that conversation, her poise might have been a trifle less confident when her big coupe purred up to the curb where Clanton stood, just as the street lights were coming on. He climbed in beside her and she turned off down a side-street according to his directions.

"Did you bring any money, in case Ram Lal wants more?" he asked.

"I should say not!" she retorted. "He's been paid enough. He owes me any future service it takes to get the right dragon."

"You're an arrogant wench," he observed, his eyes glued on a rounded knee. Through accident or design her dress

had worked up again, baring an inch of white skin above the stocking-top.

"When you get through inspecting my legs," she suggested, "you might tell me which way to turn at this next intersection."

She smiled cruelly as he reluctantly turned his attention to the street. Feeling perfectly safe from him, she took a feminine delight in tantalizing him. She was aware of her effect on him, and she enjoyed seeing the veins in his forehead swell with frustrated emotion.

"Pull up here," he directed presently, and they rolled to a halt in a shabby side-street in the native quarter. "Have to leave the boat here. They may steal the wheels off of it before we get back, but it won't navigate the alley we've got to follow. Here, this is it."

It was dark in the alley. They groped their way along and presently came out into an open space, lined on one side by rotten, deserted wharves.

"That's the warehouse," Clanton indicated a building looming darkly before them. "He's got a camp cot and some canned grub in one of the lower rooms, and he aims to hide there till I let him know what move Ahmed's makin' about that theft."

NO LIGHT showed behind the shutters of the barred windows. Clanton knocked and softly called: "Ram Lal!" No answer. He tried the door and found it to be unlocked. He pushed it open and Marianne pressed close on his heels as he entered. She jumped and grabbed his arm as they stood in the darkness.

"The door! Somebody pushed it to behind us!"

"Wind must have blown it shut," he grunted. "But where the hell's Ram Lal?"

"Listen!" She clutched him convul-

sively. Somewhere in the darkness sounded a steady *drip-drip* as if somebody had left a faucet partly open. But Clanton's hair began to rise, because he knew there wasn't any faucet in that room. He struck a match in a hurry and held it up. Marianne clapped a hand over her mouth to stifle a shriek. Clanton swore. In the wavering light they saw Ram Lal. The fat, swarthy babu slumped drunkenly in a chair near a table. His head lolled on his breast and his eyes were glassy. And, from a throat slashed from ear to ear, blood still oozed sluggishly to fall drop by drop in a widening crimson puddle on the floor.

"God almighty!" muttered Clanton. "We've got to get out of here—ow!"

Something that glinted swished at him out of the shadows. Marianne had a brief glimpse of an arc of gleaming steel and a dark contorted face behind it. Then the match went out, clipped from Clanton's hand by that slashing blade, and the dark filled with hair-raising sounds. Marianne dropped to the floor and scurried on all-fours in the direction she hoped the door was. She'd lost touch with Clanton, but he couldn't be dead, because no corpse could put up the fight he was putting up.

Lurid Anglo-Saxon oaths mingled with Asiatic yowls, and she almost pitied his adversaries as she heard what sounded like beebes being knocked in the head with a maul, but which she knew to be the impact of his massive fists on human skulls. Howls of pain and rage filled the room, the table overturned crashingly, and then somebody stumbled over her in the dark.

IT WAS a Malay. She could tell by the smell, even in the dark. She heard him floundering on the floor near her, and her blood froze at the *wheep-wheep*



of a keen blade being whirled at random. It was close behind her, and the flesh of her hips contracted as she scuttled away on her all-fours. Her groping hands found a door and pulled it open, but no light came in, and she felt steps leading upward. But any avenue of escape from that blind blade flailing the blackness was welcome.

She shut the door behind her and went up the stair as fast as she could and eventually emerged into an equally dark space that felt big and empty and smelled musty. There she crouched, shivering, while the noise of battle went on below, until it culminated in an amazing crash that sounded as though somebody had been knocked bodily through a closed door. Then the sounds died away and silence reigned. She believed that Clanton had broken away from his attackers and fled, pursued by them.

She was right. At that moment Clanton was racing down a winding alley, hearing the pad of swift feet close behind him, and momentarily expecting a knife thrust in the back. They were too many for even him to fight with his bare hands, and they were gaining on him. With a straining burst of effort he reached an empty, dim-lit side-street ahead of them, and before he vanished into an entrance on the other side, he cast something on the paving in the light of the dim street-lamp.

Startled yelps escaped his pursuers, and abandoning the chase, they pounced on the yellowed ivory dragon Clanton had discarded.

Back in the loft of the deserted warehouse Marianne crept down the stairs. For some time she had heard no sound below. Then just as she reached the stair-door, she checked, her heart in her throat. Somebody had entered the room beyond. But this man wore the boots of

a white man; she could tell by his footfalls. Then she heard a smothered, English oath.

Clanton must have eluded his pursuers and returned. She heard a match struck, and light stole through the crack under the door. She pushed the door ajar. A brawny figure, wearing a seaman's cap, with his back to the door, was bending over the corpse slumped in the chair.

"Clanton!" she exclaimed, stepping into the room—then checked in her tracks as a perfect stranger whirled around with an oath. He was as big as Clanton and much uglier. His blood-shot eyes glared, his black beard bristled, and he levelled a snub-nosed revolver at her quivering tummy.

"Don't shoot!" she gasped. "I—I won't hurt you!"

The stranger's reply was unprintable. Evidently her sudden appearance had given him a bad shock.

"Who the blinkin' hell are you and what're you doin' here?" he concluded. "Well, talk before I start sweepin' the floor with you!" He flourished a fist the size of a breakfast ham under her shrinking nose.

She shuddered and spoke hastily: "I lost my way and wandered in here by mistake—I've got to go now—glad to have met you—"

"Stow it!" bellowed the irate intruder. "You can't pull the wool over Bull Davies' eyes like that!" The aforesaid eyes narrowed wickedly in the light of the candle on a wall-shelf. "Oh, I get it!" he muttered. "Of course! You're after the dragon yourself! You killed Ram Lal to get it! Well, hand it over and you won't get hurt—maybe!"

"I haven't got it," she answered. "And I didn't kill Ram Lal. Shareef Ahmed's men did that. They were waiting in the

dark when I and my companion came in here. I don't know where they went, or what happened to the man with me."

"Likely yarn," grumbled Mr. Davies. "Ram Lal knew my boss wanted the dragon. He sent me word to come here tonight and make him an offer. He'd stole it from Shareef Ahmed. I just now got here, and found him dead and the dragon gone. It ain't on him—it must be on you!" He pointed a hairy and accusing finger at Marianne.

"I tell you I haven't got it!" she exclaimed, paling. "I want it, yes! If you'll help me find it, I'll pay you—"

"I've already been paid," he growled. "And my boss would cut my throat if I sold him out. You've got that dragon on you somewheres! You dames are smart about hidin' things on you! Off with them clothes!"

"No!" She jumped back, but he grabbed her wrist and twisted it until she fell to her knees with a yelp of pain.

"Are you goin' to shed 'em yourself, or do I have to tear 'em off?" he rumbled. "If I have to, it'll be the worse for you, blast you!"

"Let me up," she begged. "I know when I'm licked. I'll do it."

AND under his piglike eyes she shed garment after garment until she stood before him clad only in a scanty brassiere and ridiculously brief pink panties. As she discarded each garment, he snatched it and ransacked it, snarling his anger at finding his quest fruitless. Now he glared at her, silent and wrathful, and she squirmed and made protecting motions with her hands. Red fires that were not of rage began to glimmer murkily in his blood-shot eyes.

"Isn't this enough?" she begged. "You could see if I had anything on me the size of that dragon."

"Well, maybe," he admitted grudgingly, laying a heavy hand on her naked shoulder and turning her about to inspect her from every angle.

"Baby, you've got what it takes!" he muttered thickly, clapping a hot, sweaty hand down on her smooth back. "No, it's easy to see you ain't got that dragon hid on you." He grinned wickedly as one hand started to move lower. She shrieked and slapped him resoundingly, and instantly regretted her indiscretion. He grabbed her in a bear-like embrace and his ardor wasn't lessened a bit by the glassy stare of the dead man in the chair.

He was carrying her, squirming and fighting, toward the camp-cot in the corner when he stiffened.

Outside the door sounded a faint babble of approaching voices. He blew out the candle and turned through an inner door, clapping a big paw over Marianne's mouth when she tried to scream, and hissing: "Shut up, you little fool! Do you want your throat cut? That's Ahmed's men!"

He seemed to know his way about the warehouse, even in the dark. He stooped, fumbled at the floor, raised a trap-door, whispered: "If I hear one peep out of you, I'll come down there and twist your head off! I'll get you out later—if you're a good girl!"—and dropped her.

SHE was too scared to yell, even if she'd had breath for it. She did not fall far till she hit on her feet on a slimy floor. She heard the trap-door settle back in place, and then the creak of the stairs. Evidently Davies was taking refuge in the loft. She thought she heard an outer door open, and a mumble of voices, but forgot it the next instant at the sight of small red eyes winking fiercely at her from the gloom. Rats!

She had all a woman's natural fear of rodents, and she had heard horrifying tales about the ghoulish wharf-rats. But they made no move to attack her and she began to explore her prison, shivering in her near nudity. The stone floor stood in several inches of water, and she found no opening in the slimy walls. She had been dumped into a cellar and the only way out was up through that trap-door above her head.

She squealed as a rat ran across her foot, and jumped back against the wall, bruising her hip and tearing her panties on a broken plank.

"This is what I get for associating with people like Bill Clanton," she told herself bitterly, and then the rats started fighting in a corner. Their hideous racket snapped her taut nerves. She screamed. She yelled. She was too panicky to care for Davies' threat. Having her head twisted off seemed preferable to being devoured by rats in that black well. She didn't care who heard her, just so somebody did, and got her out of that damnable cellar. She didn't care much what they did to her afterward.

And almost instantly her shrieks were answered by sounds overhead. The trap was lifted and she blinked in the glare of a lantern. But it was not Davies' bearded face which was framed in the opening. It was a dark, saturnine, handsome face—the face of Shareef Ahmed!

"Well, our little guest didn't run away, after all!" he commented satirically. "Help her up, Jum Chin."

A TALL, gaunt Chinese reached his long arms down, caught her lifted wrists and swung her up lightly and easily. The trap-door fell again and she found herself standing before Ahmed, whose dark eyes devoured her from head



to foot. Four Malays with *krises* in their belts together with the Chinaman feasted their hot eyes on her semi-nudity. They were marked generously from Clanton's fists, from that fight in the dark room.

"A curious interlude!" smiled Ahmed dangerously. "You enter the building fully clothed, with that dog Clanton. Apparently you escape in the melee. But less than an hour later we find you imprisoned in the cellar, half-naked! His eyes went to the white hip exposed by the accident. She flinched, but did not reply nor resent the indignity. She was scared as only a girl can be who knows herself to be in the power of men absolutely merciless and cynical in their attitude toward women.

"Where is the Kao Tsu dragon?" Ahmed demanded peremptorily.

"I haven't it!" Her wits were working like lightning on a scheme.

Ahmed's eyes were poisonous.

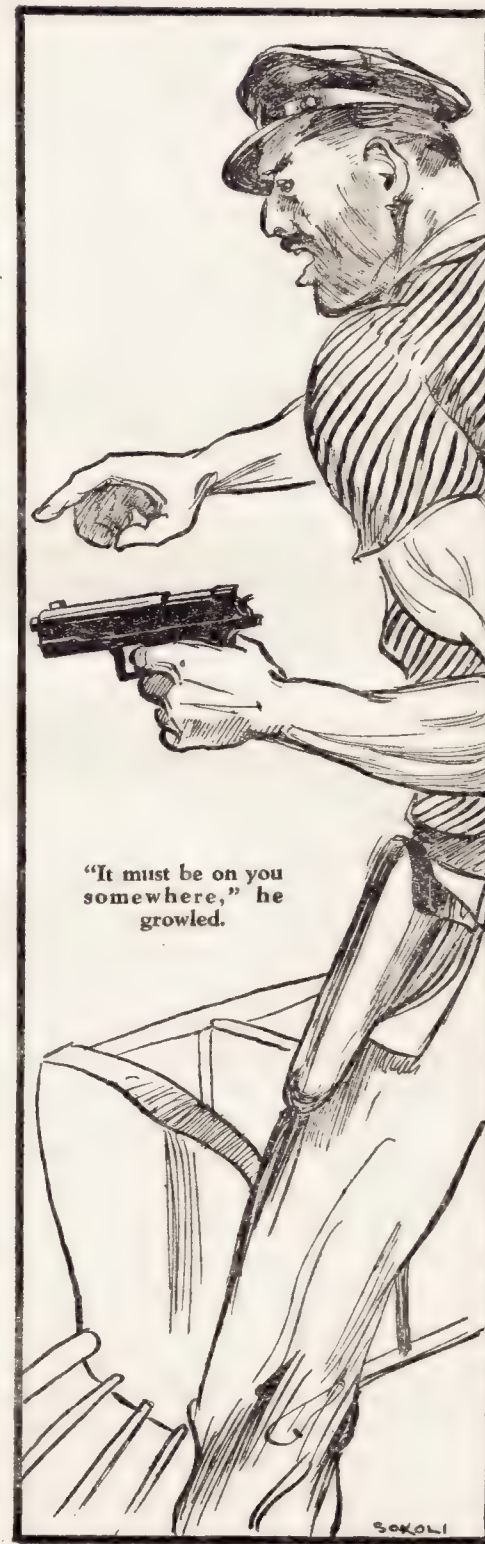
"You must have it! Ram Lal stole two dragons out of my house. Clanton dropped one in his flight." He displayed it. "But it is not the right one. You must have it. Ram Lal must have stolen them for you, otherwise Clanton, who came here with you, would not have had this one. You have the other, or know where it is. Must you be *persuaded* to talk?"

"I had it," she said hurriedly, as the Malays moved toward her, grinning evilly. "But Bull Davies came while you were chasing Clanton—"

"Davies?" It was a snarl from Ahmed. "Has that dog of General Kai's been here?"

"He is here—hiding upstairs. He took the dragon from me."

"Search the upper floor," snapped Ahmed, and his men made for the stair, soft-footed as weasels, with naked blades glimmering in their hands. Marianne



breathed in momentary relief. At least she'd saved herself from torture for the moment. Ahmed was watching the stair, and she essayed a sneaking step toward the other door. But he wheeled and caught her wrist.

"Where are *you* going?"

"Nowhere, apparently." She flinched at his sarcasm. "Please, you're hurting my wrist. Why, the body's gone!"

"We threw it in the river after we returned from pursuing Clanton," said Ahmed absently, gazing at her half-exposed breasts. "I meant to take Ram Lal alive and make him talk. But he attacked my faithful servant, Jum Chin, who traced him here, and Jum Chin was forced to kill him. I arrived with the rest of my men just after he had killed Ram Lal. We had just completed a fruitless search of the body when we heard you and Clanton approaching. Why did you come here when you already had the dragon?"

"I came to pay Ram Lal," she lied, afraid to admit the truth, now that she had already professed to have had possession of the dragon.

"Forget the dragon for a space," he muttered; his eyes were like flames licking her sleek body. "My men will capture Davies and get it for me. Meanwhile—you and I"

REALIZING his intentions she sprang for the nearest door, but he was too quick for her. He was slender but his thews were like steel. She yelped as he reached for her—squealed despairingly as she realized how helpless she was. She clenched a small fist and struck him in the face, and in return got a slap that filled her eyes with stars and tears. He picked her up, fighting and kicking, and started toward the other room with her, when upstairs a shot banged, blows

thudded, men yelled and heavy boots stampeded down the stair.

Ahmed dropped Marianne sprawling on the floor and turned to the stair door, drawing a pistol. An instant later Bull Davies, plunging through the stair-door, brought up short at the threat of that black muzzle. In an instant the five Orientals who were tumbling down the stair after him had fallen on him from behind, borne him to the floor, and had him bound hand and foot. Swift hands ransacked his garments, and then Jum Chin looked at Ahmed and shook his head. Ahmed turned on Marianne, who rose from the floor, rubbing her hip.

"You slut! You said he had it!" Ahmed grabbed a pink-white shoulder and squeezed viciously.

"Wait!" she begged, assuming a Venus de'Medici pose as he started to go even further in his third-degree methods. "He must have hidden it!"

This was going to be just too bad for Davies, she knew, but it was his hide or hers. Maybe she'd get a chance to slip away while they were giving him the works.

At a word from Ahmed, Jum Chin ripped Davies' shirt off. A Malay applied a lighted match to his hairy breast. A faint smell of singed hair arose and Davies bellowed like a bull.

"I tell you I ain't got it! She's lyin'! I dunno where it is!"

"If he's lying, we'll soon know," rasped Ahmed. "We'll try a test that will unlock the jaws of the stubbornest. If he still persists, we must conclude that he's telling the truth, and the girl's lying."

Jum Chin stripped off the prisoner's socks, and Davies broke into a sweat of fear. Intent on the coming torture, Ahmed relaxed his grip on Marianne's

wrist—or maybe it was a trick to trap her into a false move.

As his fingers relaxed, she jerked loose and darted into the outer room. He was after her in an instant, and just as she reached the door that opened into the alley, his fingers locked in her hair. But that door burst suddenly inward.

A BIG form loomed in the door and an arm shot out. There was a crack that sounded as if Ahmed had run his face into a brick wall. But it was a massive fist he had run into, and the impact stretched him groaning on the floor. His conqueror swooped on the pistol that flew from his victim's hand, and Ahmed's henchmen, rushing from the inner room, checked at the menace of the leveled Luger, their hands shooting ceilingward.

"Clanton!" panted Marianne. He refused to look at her. With six desperate men before him, he couldn't risk being demoralized by the spectacle of loveliness her unclad figure presented.

"Put on some clothes!" he snapped. "And you, Ahmed, get up!"

Ahmed staggered up, a ghastly sight, minus three teeth and with his nose a gory ruin. Clanton grinned pridefully at the sight of his handiwork; few men could have done so much damage with only one clout. He profanely silenced Ahmed's impassioned ravings, and backed all his prisoners into the inner room, whither Marianne followed, having salvaged the table cloth which she wrapped rather sketchily, sarong-fashion, about her.

Briefly she explained the situation to Clanton, and he ordered the men to lie on their bellies and put their hands behind them, while she tied their wrists and ankles with their belts and turbans. He watched her in ecstatic silence while

she was thus employed. The improvised sarong was something more than revealing, as she moved about, allowing glimpses of sweet contours that sent the blood to his head.

WHEN she had finished the job, he inspected each man, grunting his approval of her technique, and searching them for weapons. He lingered longer over Jum Chin, and when he rose, she was amazed to see a grey pallor tinging the Chinaman's face. Yet Clanton had done nothing to hurt him.

Clanton then untied Davies, and growled: "I ought to bust your snoot for pullin' off Miss Allison's clothes and throwin' her in that cellar, but I'm lettin' you off, considerin' what Ahmed did to you. Get out!"

"I'll get even with somebody, I bet!" sniveled Mr. Davies, and departed hastily, aided in his exit by the toe of the Clanton boot. When his lamentations had faded in the night, Clanton addressed his glowering prisoners.

"We're leaving. I'll send back a coolie to untie you. Ahmed, you better forget what's happened tonight. The dragon's gone. Only Ram Lal knew what became of it, and he's dead. And if the British find out you killed him, they'll hang you, sure as hell! You let us alone, and keep your mouth shut, and we'll keep ours shut."

Fear gleamed in Ahmed's one good eye at the mention of hanging. He was sullenly silent as Clanton followed the girl into the outer room and closed the door behind them.

"Do you think he'll drop the matter?" she asked nervously. "I can't afford to have this story get in the papers."

"No, you can't," he agreed. "Theft, murder, torture, bribin' a thief like Ram

(Continued on page 123)

BLOOD

and FIRE

By ALAN ANDERSON

Julian's whole fortune was due to the skill of Spartacus, his gladiator. And yet it's a female slave who saves Spartacus when his master betrays him!



WHEN the guard had passed, a grimy hand picked up a stick and struck the stone wall three light blows. The reply came dully. There was a crack in the wall. Festered lips pressed there.

"Spartacus! Be ye well?"

"I hunger. I thirst. In time I shall perish," came the weak reply.

"Courage, Spartacus! We, too, hunger."

"Be there news?"

"Nay. Madness hast assuredly seized our master. Thou who art his greatest



The gladiator's chains snapped like rotten cloth. Heedless of the lash, he leaped.

treasure lie rotting in a dungeon."

"And thou?"

"We, too, starve. The Nubian hast

perished from the hundred lashes. Yet our master still buys slaves. Roman armies have conquered."

"Cursed be these Roman dogs!" said Spartacus in a savage voice.

"Today ten female slaves arrive. But caution! Be ready. A few crumbs I wilt blow through the crack. Food is precious. 'Tis all we can spare."

The man dusted crumbs into the crack and blew. On the other side, Spartacus caught them in his cupped hand. At the roof of the dungeon there was a tiny barred window in the wall. It admitted a faint light. Spartacus carried the crumbs to a hole at the base of the opposite wall. He piled them there.

Then he knelt to one side and picked up a stone. He crouched in statue-like immobility. Time passed. A half an hour. He did not move. An hour went by. His bones ached and his flesh was cold. Still he was motionless.

THEN there was a faint movement at the hole. A tiny, whiskered snout appeared. Spartacus tensed. A gray head appeared. Button black eyes surveyed the place. Assured, a huge rat stuck his head into the dungeon. Then its shoulders. A wet tongue began to lick up the crumbs. The stone fell. The rat perished.

With a knife-sharp stone, Spartacus gutted the beast and skinned it. Then he disjointed it and began to devour the still warm flesh. The meat was tough and bitter. But he wolfed it down. He cracked the skull and sucked out the brains. The eyes, too, he ate. His stomach threatened to revolt. He got up and paced the floor.

"I be a Spartan," he assured himself. "All the might of the Roman Empire canst not bend my will."

Strength swept through his body and his despair lightened. He returned to the remains of the rat, squeezed out the en-

trails and ground his teeth on the elastic tissue.

"Thirty and three days in this stinking dungeon," he muttered to himself. "New slaves, eh? And 'twas my skill that won them. Yet my bloated master Julian hast thrown me into this wretched dungeon. Patience, Spartacus! Suffering makes vengeance the sweeter."

He laughed a trifle madly and hate blazed in his eyes. Then knowing the madness that might result from inactivity, he swept up the remains of the rat and hid them behind a loose stone in the wall. Three knocks echoed dismally throughout the dungeon. He went to the wall.

"Be warned, Spartacus! Many guards cross the yard."

But by the time the guards reached the dungeons, the crack had been filled with mortar. The slaves, herded like cattle, were taken from the building and marched to the basement of the villa where hot baths awaited them.

"Our master Julian hast guests," whispered Joseph, the Judean, to Spartacus. "Again he displays his worldly goods."

The slaves bathed, were given clean loin cloths and, after their hands had been shackled, were escorted to the main room of the villa.

It was a huge room with luxurious couches forming a rectangle within the walls. Between each couch, and set on a waist-high pedestal of stone, were brass braziers filled with burning charcoal. They were about two feet in diameter and gave off a pleasant heat. Spartacus thought of the death chill of his dungeon and smiled. It was not a nice smile.

RECLINING on one of the couches, and with a female slave squatting

on the floor at his head, Julian held a cup of wine in one hand. With the other he ruffled the red curls of the slave, who was viewing the male slaves with contempt. Behind Julian stood a handsome youth attired in the colorful cape of the Empress's own guard. Next to him stood a well-formed, not unhandsome woman some thirty years of age whose face bore the stamp of cruelty.

"These be my fighting slaves, sister," said Julian to the woman with a careless wave at the men before them.

"A well-scarred rabble, but one," said she. "Who be the scarless one? A fledgling?"

"Ho! Ho!" laughed Julian and his great belly rolled. "That man be Spartacus. The greatest gladiator in all the Empire. A hundred and ten men hast he slain."

"His eyes be gray and methinks hate simmers there," said the woman, but added: "Yet he is young and handsome. What be thy price?"

"To Julian, he be priceless," said the youth at her side. "But for Spartacus, Julian would have no riches."

Julian colored.

"Hold thy tongue, cousin Aristius!" he ordered. "Thou hatest me, that I know. But this be my household."

"Aye, Aristius," said the woman, "thou art a fool. Thou who believes in free men and maids."

"Sister," said Julian, "in five days Spartacus fights again. Thou must stay for the games. Four days hence cousin Aristius wilt match his gray Arabs at the chariot races at the Circus Maximus. Mayhap disaster wilt plague him."

They laughed at that. The fight slaves milled uneasily. Although they knew of the games, the word had been passed that Julian would enter none in the lists. Spartacus's face was expressionless but

his gray eyes were cold and glazed with hate. Thanks to Julian's drunkenness, the whole fiendish plot had been given away. Rage welled within the Spartan but he betrayed it not. He was of the land of stoics.

"So this be Spartacus," said Julian's sister and her eyes traveled over the slave's magnificently muscled body. "His fame be great."

"Come! Come!" cried Julian. "I weary of this."

The sister laughed.

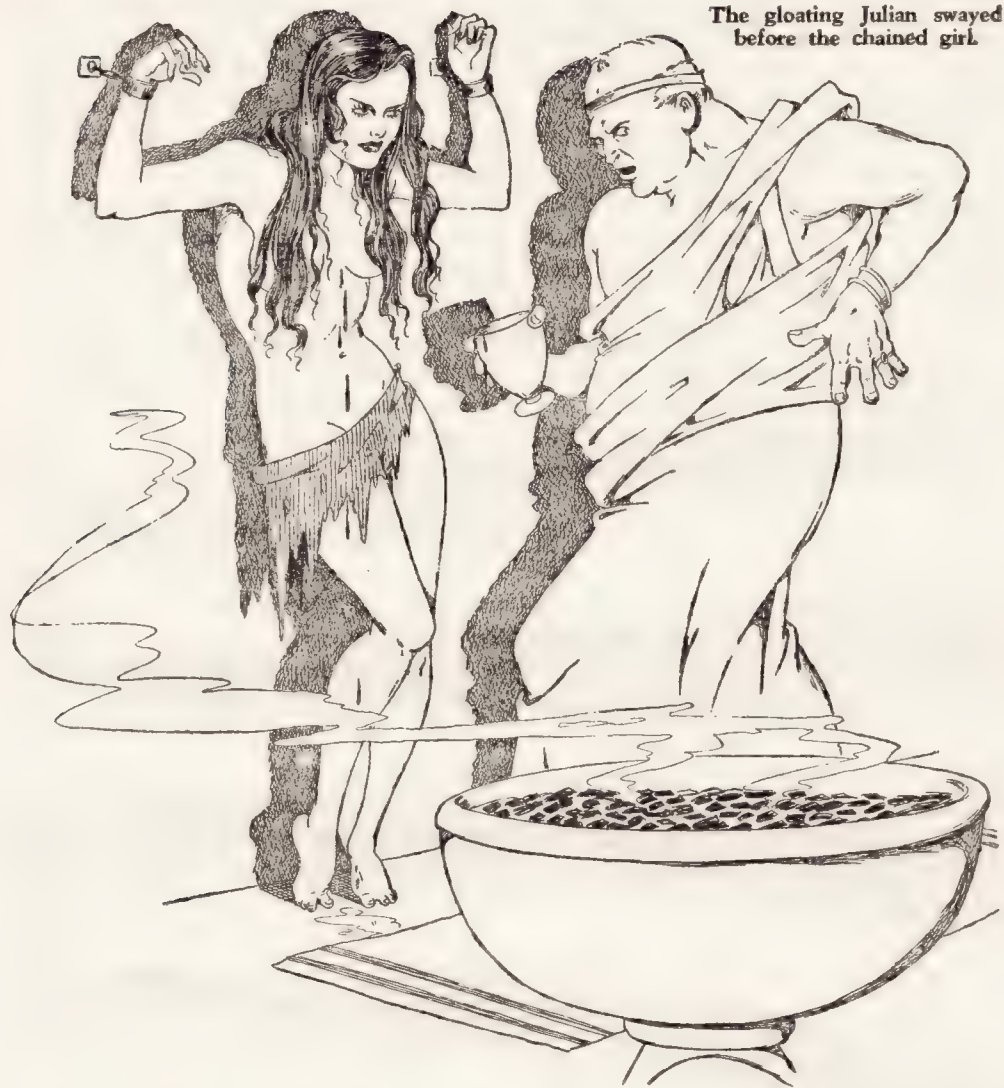
"Aye! Thou wouldst view the ten female slaves."

JULIAN shrugged and ordered that the slaves be brought in. On the floor, the red head had slyly opened the bodice of her robe to reveal some of the pert whiteness of her small breasts. Only Spartacus remained serene. The girl laughed drunkenly and lifted her skirt. White legs gleamed.

The female slaves, weighted with chains, were herded into the room. They varied in color from a coal black Nubian to a milk white maiden of the Rhine. All were ineffectively attired in tatters. Here and there a bare leg appeared and through rents small expanses of varicolored breasts were visible.

Expressions varied. The Nubian was dejected and resigned to her fate. The maid of the valley of the Rhine was smiling invitingly, as were others, to gain the favor of their new master and thereby win a life of ease and luxury.

Only one was defiant. She was a young girl of no great stature, yet superbly formed. Her black hair, blacker eyes, and olive swarthinness proclaimed her a daughter of Andalusia which was not yet Spain. She had obviously been roughly handled by the guards for her robe was in rags. Her left thigh and hip



The gloating Julian swayed before the chained girl.

were bare to the waist and reflected a golden shimmer. The cloth had been torn partly from her left breast but she had covered it with her hand; a gesture which accented the protrusion of the dome-shaped flesh and the smallness of her hand. Her beauty was of such intensity that a hush greeted her presence.

"A maid to my liking," declared Julian and rose to one elbow—a physical exertion for him.

"Thou shalt have me not!" cried the

girl and faced him. This brought her back into Spartacus's line of vision; a gloriously nude back, wedge-shaped and so fine grained that it glistened like polished wood. He saw that her hips were richly curved in the first bloom of womanhood and that her legs were straight and finely shaped. Thrills raced through the Spartan. Here was a woman of his own kind; beautiful, desirable and spirited.

"Then shall thou clean the offal from

my kitchen until thy tune does change," said Julian with a yawn.

"Roman pig!" she cried between clenched teeth.

"Give her five lashes!" ordered Julian with a frown. "That wilt change her tune."



Spartacus uttered an animal cry of rage.

A burly guard stepped up. A long lash circled through the air. There was a sharp crack and a livid welt appeared on that glossy back. The girl cried out but did not wince. The lash flicked out. It cut a furrow across her shoulder blades and the heavy tip snapped into the first swell of her breast. Blood came. Spartacus was fired with rage. Julian laughed, as did his sister. Aristius was pale. The lash cracked. The girl fell to one knee.

SOMETHING snapped in Spartacus's brain. His arms tensed. Chains parted like rotten cloth. He sprang toward Julian who was blubbing with fear. The red-haired slave jumped to her feet. Spartacus shoved her. She fell across Julian's stomach, turned completely over and landed on the other side of the couch. A lash bit into Spartacus's flesh. Many hands seized him. Consumed with rage, he jerked free. The burly guard spun him around and struck out with the butt of the lash.

Spartacus blocked the blow. His hard fist hit the guard in the mouth. He fell back spitting out blood and teeth. But many hands were seizing the Spartan. Bodies pressed against him. He fought desperately, hopelessly. He fell under the weight of numbers. Ropes were being tied to his wrists and ankles. His vision blurred a moment.

Then he was alone on the floor with Julian standing above him. To one side he could see the Andalusian. Her black eyes had lost their hate; were soft and grateful.

"Cursed Spartan!" cried Julian livid with rage.

He kicked Spartacus in the face. blood came. He kicked again and again. Flesh became swollen and numb. But the gray eyes did not lose their hate. Then Julian had the lash and was laying it on with all the strength of his bloated body. The Spartan endured the torture without a vestige of pain. Then, mercifully, came unconsciousness.

HE RETURNED to consciousness in his dungeon. His body ached intolerably. But he got to his feet. Dizziness possessed him, but he endured it without protest. He felt his face. It was puffed and sore to the touch. Physically

he was a wreck of a man. But within him burned fierce fires of hate and determination.

Julian had been too loose with his tongue. Thirty and three days in the dungeon was explained. Could he, a lone slave, combat the power of Julian and the might of an Empire? Was there no way to avert this diabolical plot? He sat down and thought.

Presently he went to the wall and signaled.

"Joseph, 'tis Spartacus. Be the Andalusian well?"

"Ten more lashes she got. But she lives even though on a bed of blood."

"'Tis well. Hark ye well, Joseph! Pass the word that Spartacus wouldst speak with Aristius."

"Thou hast plans?" said the Julian excitedly.

"Aye! Death to Julian. Freedom for all of us."

Saying no more, Spartacus returned to the warmest corner of his dungeon and sat staring at the dark walls. A new sense of hope buoyed him. There was a smile on his cut lips—not a nice smile by any means.

"Spartacus wouldst speak with Aristius!"

By mysterious channels, the word sped. From the cleaning slave, it went to the villa. It traveled through the kitchen and to the stables. There a slave wrote it on the under side of a saddle while his companion kept guard. Later a servant came to the stables for a horse.

"If thou goest to the city," said one of the slaves, "thou shalt have the white steed. 'Tis the master's orders."

"Aye! I ride to the city."

The two slaves exchanged knowing glances. The saddle was put on the horse. The servant departed, reached the city and went to a public stable. There

a slave saw a small mark on the stirrup which foretold a message within the saddle. He read it carefully; memorized it. Another slave came in.

"Be there a steed of Aristius here?"

"Nay. But one of Marcus who lives nearby."

"Then bring me his saddle."

THUS was the grapevine telegraph which all the might of Imperial Rome had not uncovered.

The news reached Aristius at supper. He frowned, turned to his lovely wife and said:

"Treachery brews at Julian's. If only this gladiator hast devised the downfall of my cousin!" He got up and paced the floor. "The ruin of Julian wouldst please the Emperor for the fat fool waxes in wealth and power."

"Then thou shall go?" asked his wife.

"Aye! This Spartacus is a man to my liking."

AFTER a sleepless, foodless night, Spartacus was summoned to the crack. His face had lost some of its soreness but he was still weak and exhausted. Yet strong purpose drove away despair.

"Spartacus, 'tis Aristius?"

"Aristius! How got ye here?"

"By a ruse. In the guise of a physician. What knowest thou?"

"That Julian doest plan to gain riches beyond his fondest dream," said Spartacus bitterly. "For thirty and four days have I rotted in this cell. Knowest thou why?"

"Nay! It is senseless."

"'Tis the whim of a Satan. Julian weakens me that I lose to this gladiator of Gaul. He bets against me, for the odds be great. Then shall he prosper by my death."

There was a brief silence as Aristius's shocked brain accepted the devilish plan.

"And thy plan?" asked Aristius.

"I shall not die," declared Spartacus. "Bet ye all thy gold and treasures on me. Julian wilt wager his toga if needs be."

"But I have not such riches for thou art the favorite, and for each gold coin against thee I must answer with ten."

"Aye! But if tongues tattle of Julian's plan, then the odds wilt fall."

"But thou? If he starves thee, thou canst not win."

"I have thought of that. Two days before the game, contrive that the officials of the Coliseum shall visit here and examine my health."

"'Tis a cunning stroke!" declared Aristius in high humor. "For this, what doest thou desire?"

"Freedom for me and the Andalusian slave. Freedom for the fighting slaves. They shall fight as free men and pay you what thou wagers. But ask them."

There was the murmur of voices as Aristius consulted Joseph the Judean, nominal head of the fighting slaves. Soon Aristius returned to the crack.

"'Tis agreed. I trust thee, Spartacus. I wilt need gold beyond my riches. But I guard the Empress's jewels. Fail me not, for it would ruin me and bring death to my wife."

"I shall perish not!" declared Spartacus in a strong, purposeful voice. "There be others to think of. Be at peace, friend Aristius. Do thy part and I shall do mine."

Aristius departed. He was determined to follow the agreed plan. But misgivings assailed him. All his gold, all his property, and every possession of his wife's would not be enough. Well, he had the four gray Arabs, horses of great worth. He'd bet them too. And he could borrow the Empress's jewels. For a reason he

couldn't fathom, his faith in Spartacus was limitless.

THAT day Spartacus had a stroke of good fortune. He could reach the solitary window at the ceiling where he habitually clung, watching the yard. A sleek, well-fed cat of the villa had the misadventure to explore the barred window. A strong hand choked the life from its body. With his right arm scratched and bloody, Spartacus feasted. There was meat to spare. His spirits soared. The games were four days off.

The next day the gossip started by Aristius bore fruit. Many gamblers came to Julian demanding to see Spartacus. He demured. That night the odds fell. Slobbering with rage, Julian continued to bet. Then he was struck by an inspiration prompted by the devil himself.

"Get ye to these gamblers," he ordered his steward, "and tell them to repair here two days before the games. Then I shall show them Spartacus. In the meantime feed him well and remove him from the dungeon."

"But, sire? The bets?"

"Continue to bet on the Gaul. I have devised a plan."

"Then Spartacus shall fall?"

"Aye. He wilt die at the sword point of this Gaul," declared Julian and his pig-like eyes narrowed. He laughed. The problem was solved.

WELL-fed, carefully cared for, and provided with every comfort, Spartacus knew that terror of impending disaster which gave no clue as to its nature. Worry consumed him. Julian had devised his defeat. But how?

Two days before the games, gamblers and officials of the Coliseum visited the Spartan. They found him in perfect

health. The physician's examination revealed no reason why he should, from a physical standpoint, lose the combat.

"Thou cunning one," said a gambler to the leering Julian. "Thou started the rumor that the odds fall. Then did thou bet on thy gladiator?"

The odds immediately rose to new heights. One gold coin wagered on the Gaul demanded fifteen from those who bet on Spartacus. Aristius's faith never wavered. But his riches and those of his wife were pledged. The next day he would race his Arabs at the chariot races. He became nervous and absent-minded. His wife, who knew nothing of the matter, was concerned. But that night he would guard the precious jewels of his Empress!

THE next day Aristius won the chariot races at the Circus Maximus! He decreed it a good omen. From the riches got from the pawned Empress's jewels, he covered every bet of Julian who had pledged his wealth down to every stone of his villa.

That night Spartacus, thanks to a compound made by the clever Judean, enjoyed a dreamless sleep. He awakened the day of the games refreshed and in splendid condition. But his brain was cold with fear. When the guards came to lead him to his master, he was seemingly possessed and unworried. They chained his wrists and led him to the kitchens. There they left him alone while they went to Julian for instructions.

A movement at the doorway captured Spartacus's attention. There stood the Andalusian viewing him with smouldering eyes!

She wore a sack-like robe, but even that could not hide the splendor of her figure. Her breasts tented the fabric

and, through the cloth, he could see the nut-brown gloss of them. A draught of air beat the skirt of the robe back against her legs outlining the fine firmness of her ample thighs and the delicious curves of her matchless hips.

Then she walked to him and her breasts began a faint swaying and trembling and her hips swayed with a seductive rhythm. Her full, scarlet lips were half parted to reveal white teeth and her nostrils were slightly dilated. Her eyes were black diamonds that sent a shiver down the Spartan's spine. Her mere presence was intoxicating. He swallowed the lump in his throat.

"I love thee!" she whispered in a fierce vibrant, tone. "Thou art assuredly my man. For always."

"And I thee love," he said very humbly. "The vision of thy loveliness hast haunted me. But for these bounds my arms would devour thee."

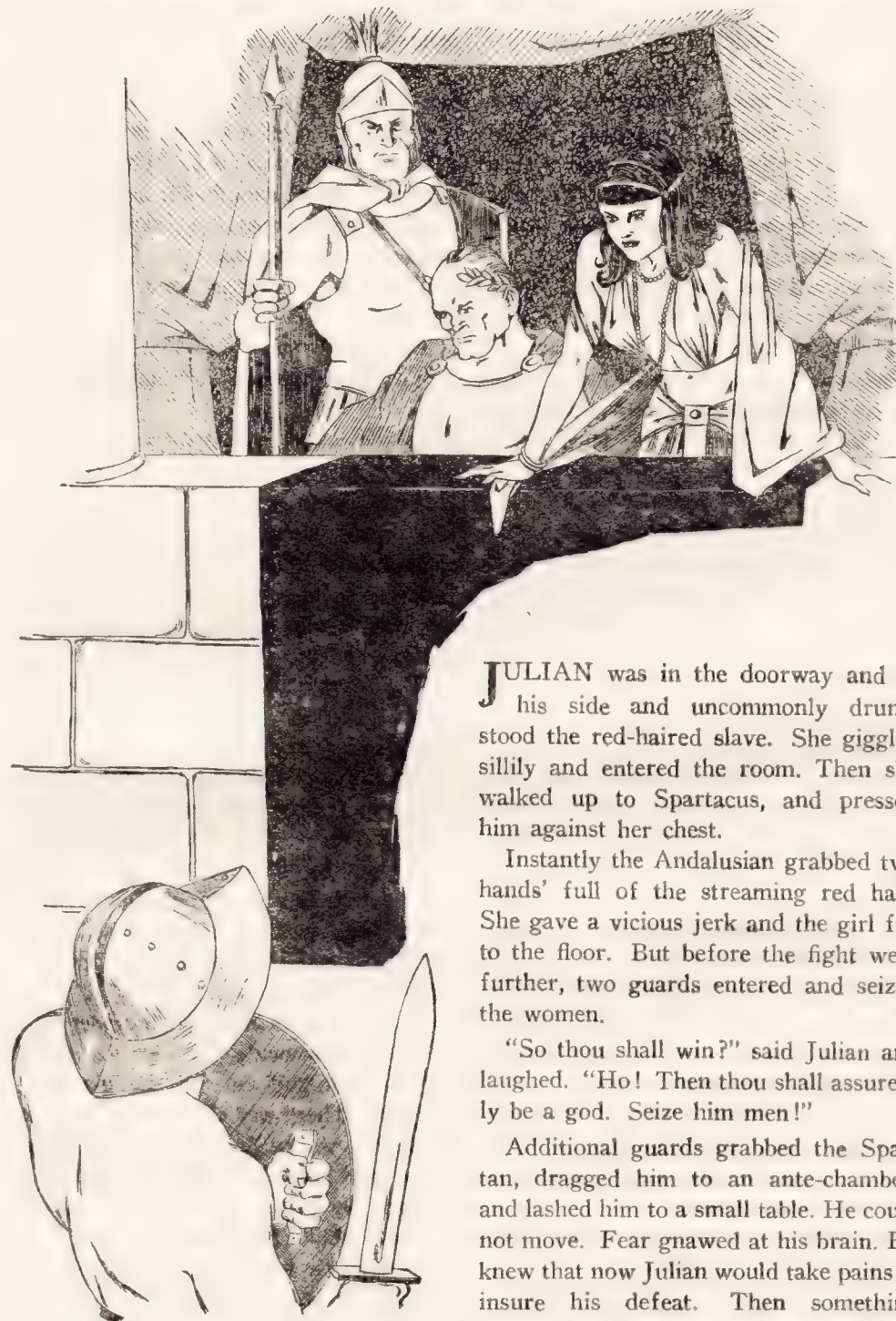
Then she took him in her arms and her wet lips closed on his mouth. Through the thin cloth the heat of her body fired him and the lush softness of her breasts flattened against the steel hard muscles of his chest to impart to his body an exotic weakness. Her mouth pressed hard on his lips until her body trembled and swayed like a column of flame.

When she released him, his lips were bruised and swollen from the fury of her kisses. Both were shaken and dizzy.

"That," she avowed, "is but a sample of the love that is thine." Her hand went to her breast, clutched as if striving to still the mad racing of her heart.

"And thou must win, Spartacus, my love. Come what will, thou must win. Thou swears to that?"

Mad laughter flooded the room before Spartacus could reply.



JULIAN was in the doorway and at his side and uncommonly drunk, stood the red-haired slave. She giggled sillily and entered the room. Then she walked up to Spartacus, and pressed him against her chest.

Instantly the Andalusian grabbed two hands' full of the streaming red hair. She gave a vicious jerk and the girl fell to the floor. But before the fight went further, two guards entered and seized the women.

"So thou shall win?" said Julian and laughed. "Ho! Then thou shall assuredly be a god. Seize him men!"

Additional guards grabbed the Spartan, dragged him to an ante-chamber, and lashed him to a small table. He could not move. Fear gnawed at his brain. He knew that now Julian would take pains to insure his defeat. Then something crashed down on his skull and blackness closed in like a swift nightfall.

"In the leg," was the last thing he

"Slay the barbarian—or I forfeit my jewels," she whispered.

heard Julian say, "the straps of the sandals will conceal it."

WHEN Spartacus awakened, he saw that he was in the room wherein gladiators of the villa were prepared before going to the Coliseum. He was stretched out on a board and many hands were massaging him.

He moved and terror brought sweat to his brow. He was as weak as a kitten! His eyes clouded, then cleared. Joseph was there at his side. Slaves were packed about the table. He saw that the Andalusian was holding his hand. Her face was pale. Somehow, he managed to smile.

"A slave saw," whispered Joseph, for guards were at the door. "Julian hast had thou bled. The swine!"

The Andalusian left but quickly returned. The slaves packed tighter about the table. Stooping swiftly, she closed her mouth on his. Warm milk trickled between his lips. He sucked greedily.

"Thou art to have no food," she whispered, just as another female slave stooped and offered him a mouthful of milk. Others brought milk. Then the Andalusian again. Joseph was grim and wordless. The guards saw no one bearing food and were content.

"Blood he needs," said the Andalusian with a fierce resolve to the silent Joseph. "They say that thou wert a physician in thy homeland. Is there no way?"

"Aye! A method I learned from the Egyptians. But 'tis dangerous. A bubble of air and he wilt perish should it enter his blood stream."

"He wilt perish anyway. Come! We of Andalusia are rich in blood."

"Aye!" whispered someone. "There is a glass tube here."

With the Andalusian's arm pressed tight to his, Spartacus watched as Jos-

eph got out a knife. Both arms were opened. The tube was inserted. The Spartan was vaguely conscious that new heat was passing into his blood. He saw the Andalusian gradually grow pale. His fingers lost their coldness. The girl wet her lips. She was unafraid. Soon it was over. Joseph smeared a stinging ointment on the incisions.

"Be quick!" warned someone. "The guards."

The guards came into the room.

"Get him dressed!" was ordered.

EAGER hands fastened on the sandals and wound the straps to the calf. His waist was sashed and about it was fastened a wide metal girdle. Soft leather bound his wrists for greater strength. Joseph, who was to accompany him, held the visored helmet. The sword would be at the coliseum.

"Ha!" laughed a guard. "Julian is too drunk to attend the games. He dallies with the red head."

Outside a chariot was waiting. Spartacus was feeling stronger. But he acted weak and dazed. He and Joseph climbed in behind the driver. Mounted guards surrounded them to prevent any attempt to escape. A servant ran from the house.

"The Tartar is to return with the tidings," he called.

The Tartar nodded and they set out. Good time was made. They arrived without incident and entered the gladiator quarters. There was confusion there but Spartacus was well guarded. Aristius, white and shaking, forced his way through the crowd.

"Fear not!" Spartacus confided. "I gain strength every moment. See me before I enter the arena."

Aristius vanished. Julian's steward replaced him.

"If thou winst," he whispered to Spar-

tacus, "Julian wilt have the Andalusian ravished. Afterward her body wilt be fed to the dogs."

Overhead, came the roar of forty-five thousand spectators as some contest ended. Then came the impatient shuffling of feet as patrons consulted their programs. Next Spartacus, their favorite, would meet the Gaul! What rumors had been going around?

Joseph fastened on the shield. Spartacus raised it, held it over his head then lowered it. He was slow. That worried him. The bleeding had weakened him more than he'd thought.

"Ready, Spartacus!" called an official.

He got up and went to the iron doors to the arena just as the bloody corpse of a man was carried in. He took the helmet from Joseph. Aristius came up.

"Do as I bid," said Spartacus. "Contrive to stop the Tartar who wilt carry the tidings to Julian. He is the man with the black beard. Then have for me outside thy own chariot with thyself at the reins. The combat Julian shall hear from my lips."

With his shield at attention and the helmet cradled in his right arm, Spartacus stood awaiting the summons. It came—the blare of trumpets.

He marched into the field to be greeted by a great ovation of cheering. The stands rose as one man and cheer after cheer flooded the city. And why not—here was the gladiator of all times; the man who had slain fifty more than his nearest rival.

Officials were in the center of the field leveling the turf. Spartacus marched toward the Imperial box at one end of the Coliseum and from the corner of his eye appraised the Gaul who was angling in from the opposite side. They arrived together and made their salutations to the Emperor and Empress.

That Julian wasn't there, pleased Spartacus.

The Empress leaned over the rail of the box. She was a superb beauty. She smiled but her eyes were worried.

"All Rome wishes thee well," she told Spartacus. "Slay this barbarian. Slay him else. . ." She lowered her voice "else I forfeit my jewels."

IN shocked silence, Spartacus saluted, wheeled and marched toward the center of the field. Aristius had told the Empress! And she had pledged her jewels. His heart choked with pride. Why, the fate of the Empire might hinge on this combat!

He did not listen to the instructions he knew by heart. Fear numbed his brain. Not for himself but for the Andalusian. She was weak from loss of blood. Her resistance would be low. That brown, sleek body offered to Julian! He shivered.

His helmet was put on. It was padded and fit snugly about his head. The visor was cunningly fashioned to encompass his face and chin. The straps were adjusted at his neck. Through the tiny slits, he saw the Gaul. His opponent was a mountain of a man, barrel chested, and a head taller than the Spartan. Moreover he was supremely confident; almost strutting. Then Spartacus knew that the Gaul knew of his weakness. The blare of trumpets ended thought.

As was the custom, they were first given wooden swords and began their mock combat. Before the silly custom had gone far, howls from the stands prompted the Emperor to end the fray. They were given short steel swords with a guarded hilt and a double cutting edge.

For a moment or so they tested the balance of their weapons. The Gaul cut

(Continued on page 119)

PYGMY

Magic



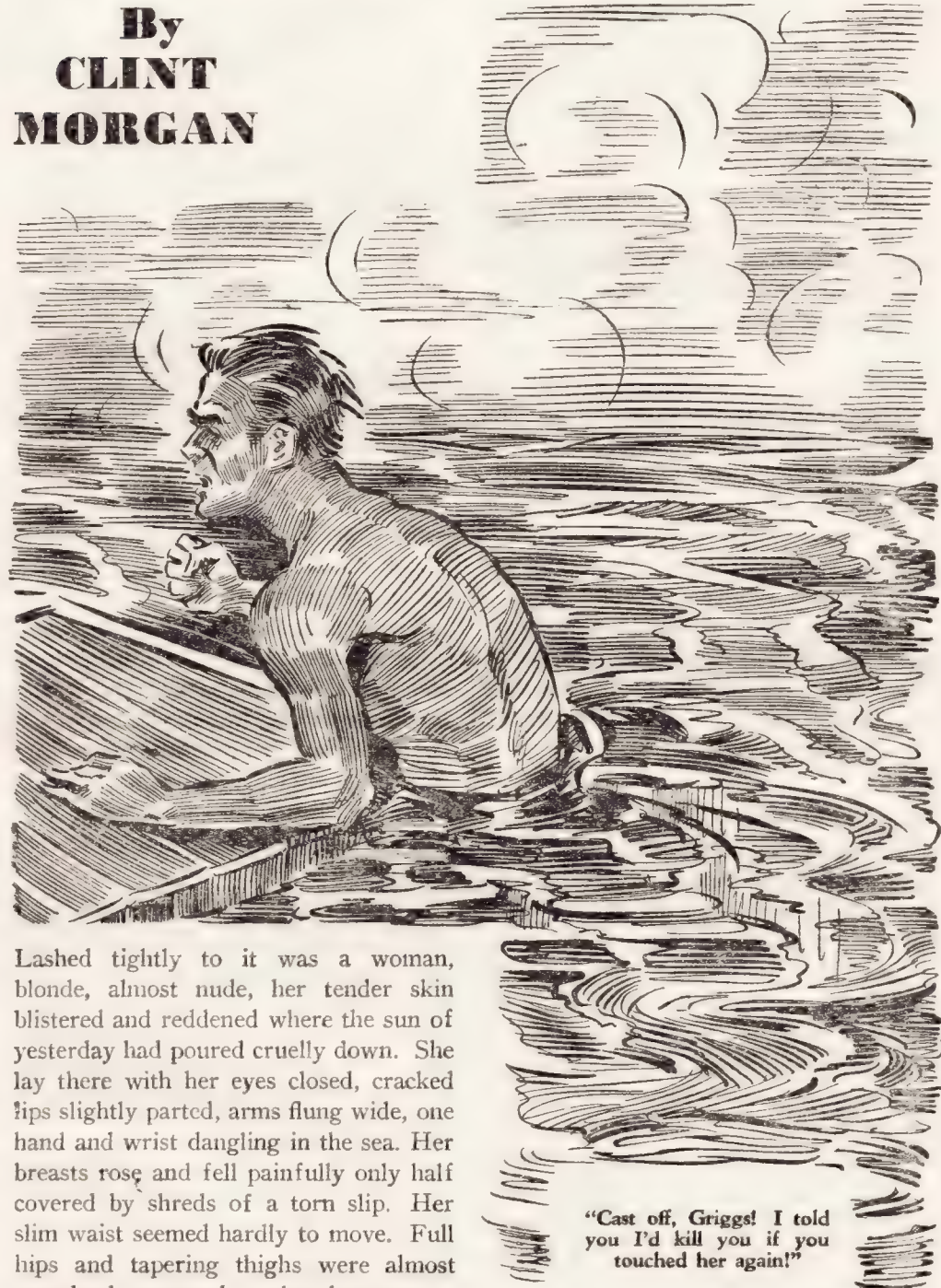
SUNRISE on an empty sea. Dark clouds that made the sunlight copper. Choppy waves that tossed the hatch cover relentlessly.

The hatch cover was all that was left of the freighter *Elba*, bound from Brisbane to Batavia through the Torres Straits and the Timor Sea. The blow had caught her off Point Kennedy just after she had dropped her rudder and while she lay temporarily disabled.

Now the hatch cover danced in the choppy waters off the coast of Papua.

Shipwrecked—dying of thirst on a hatch-cover in mid-ocean. And just as escape looms near, Moreland finds himself and the girl in the power of a crazed sailor!

By
**CLINT
MORGAN**



Lashed tightly to it was a woman, blonde, almost nude, her tender skin blistered and reddened where the sun of yesterday had poured cruelly down. She lay there with her eyes closed, cracked lips slightly parted, arms flung wide, one hand and wrist dangling in the sea. Her breasts rose and fell painfully only half covered by shreds of a torn slip. Her slim waist seemed hardly to move. Full hips and tapering thighs were almost completely exposed to the elements.

Clinging to the rope that lashed her

"Cast off, Griggs! I told you I'd kill you if you touched her again!"

firm, his body in the water, was Don Moreland, radio operator of the *Elba*. He rested his chin and the side of his face on the wooden cover, his red hair wild and wet flattened against the hatch. From time to time he licked the salt from his parched lips, spat into the water. Green eyes burned with a strange, tortured light.

On the other side of the hatch cover, Griggs, the Melbourne engine wiper, also in the water with his claw-like fingers twined in the same rope. His face was twisted, seamed, wracked by pain, the skin peeling from his skinny arms and shoulders. His lips, too, were puffed and cracked, but his eyes glowed with the fire of madness.

One skinny hand released its grip, crawled slowly toward the white body of the woman on the cover. For a second his fingers brushed soft feminine flesh. The woman did not move. The Melbourne dockrat sank the fingers convulsively in yielding whiteness. The woman stirred, her eyes came open. She saw the leering face of Griggs and groaned aloud, tried to pull away.

DON MORELAND raised his red head from the hatch cover, glimpsed the ugly drama before him. His eyes suddenly blazed. Inch by inch he made his way through the waves around the edge of the hatch cover. He was almost on Griggs before he was seen. The little man released his hold, started to whimper and whine. As he whined, he moved away, moved for the opposite side of the cover.

Moreland yelled hoarsely through cracked lips, "Cast off, Griggs, damn you! I'm going to throw you off if you don't. I told you I'd kill you if you touched her again!"

"Aw, Sparks, for the love of God! I

was just seeing if she was alive. Don't make me cast off. I'd die, man. They'll pick us up any time now! Let me stay!" His voice was an abject whine.

The exhausted woman had relaxed again, lay with her eyes closed. Her voice could hardly be heard. "Give him a chance, Don."

"Yeah," whined Griggs, "just a chance. It's gonna squall again, Sparks, and I wouldn't get fifty yards. Look at them clouds!"

Overhead black clouds were gathering, were racing through the skies as if bound for a common destination. Those clouds held wind, and rain! Don Moreland knew that. The sun dived behind the clouds, the velocity of the wind increased.

Then Griggs saw it. As the hatch cover was tossed high he screamed, "Look Look! It's a canoe, a native canoe and it's empty as hell!"

The girl strained upright. Moreland heaved himself half up on the hatch cover and peered into the wind. He smelled the canoe before he saw it, recognized the smell for the nauseating, revolting odor of putrifying flesh. A native canoe that had been swept to sea! The crew had no doubt died from thirst and starvation!

And, the wind was bringing the light craft directly down upon them. It would pass some fifty yards to starboard. Without a word he loosed his grip on the rope, turned on his face and started toward the drifting canoe with long, even strokes. Behind him he heard the voice of Griggs.

"Damn you! Damn you! Don't leave us here, Sparks, don't leave us, we'll die."

THE smell almost overwhelmed him as he rested on the outrigger of the

small dugout. He shook the saltwater from his eyes, made out a platform-like bamboo structure built in the prow of the canoe. Atop it was a rattan-wrapped bundle, a corpse! This, then was a burial canoe!

Well, it was no time to be squeamish. The wind was rising in a steady howl, the sky growing steadily darker. Two more strokes and he made it, clambered over the side and squatted in the bottom to catch his breath. The stench was terrible. In the gloom he made out three or four carved paddles, a spear, a stone axe, a war club. This man, evidently a warrior, had been sent to a sea burial with his weapons.

Don seized a clumsy paddle, headed the canoe for the hatch cover. Griggs made for the boat. Moreland had to threaten him with the paddle before he would return to help Irene Garver from the hatch cover. Some few minutes later they were safely aboard the canoe, Moreland crouched in the stern, paddle in hand! Griggs beneath the platform, whining in the prow; and the girl stretched out amidships.

"Griggs," snapped Moreland, "pick up that axe and cut the body loose from the platform. It's going to storm again and it makes us top heavy." Griggs protested but went to work, hacking unsteadily at the rattan cords.

Suddenly he stopped, staggered back, dropping the axe. "Look at it, look at it," he whimpered.

A jagged streak of lightning illuminated the sea for a full two seconds as it crackled across the heavens. Although the body of the corpse was decomposed the head had been mumified. It was the black, gaunt face of the typical Papuan with a high bridged nose that bore a bone ornament stuck through the base. It was painted in grotesque figures, curling de-

signs fearful to see. But it wasn't the face that caused Moreland to start and shudder. It was the hair. Wild and outstanding like that of all bush savages, it was a vivid red in color! And the decomposed flesh of the body had at one time been gilded a brilliant gold!

"Throw him over," said Moreland hoarsely. The body hit the sea and the squall broke. The rain came down in torrents. The girl lay flat on her back and opened her mouth. The feel of fresh water was balm on her swollen tongue, her parched lips. Griggs and Moreland turned their faces toward the heavens. Moreland tried to keep the frail canoe pointed into the waves, tried to keep the gigantic breakers from swamping them.

HOW long he crouched there with tortured muscles he never knew. It must have been all day, for the sun did not reappear. When the wind died down and the waves subsided, the western sky was stained a faint scarlet through its grey. Moreland looked down at the sleeping woman in the bottom of the boat. Her whole body looked refreshed. What few wisps of clothing she still possessed were wet and clinging, scarcely hiding a solitary curve of her chiseled body.

From beneath the platform on the prow of the boat Moreland saw Griggs sweeping his inflamed little eyes over the feminine loveliness that lay at his feet. He tried to mumble a curse, tried to warn Griggs again, but weariness overtook him. His bowed head sank down on his chest. His body was one long exultant throb of paining muscles and protesting flesh. His eyes closed; he slept.

He was awakened by the sun high in the heavens beating down on his sore face. Seemingly from a great distance



ble on his chin, ran down on his skinny chest. He muttered and driveled, cackled and laughed like a child with a new toy. The girl groaned as his clawlike hands darted out to caress her.

"Griggs! I'll kill you! Damn you, I'll kill you!" Moreland wondered if that harsh voice were his own. The eyes Griggs turned toward him were those of a madman. The irises had almost entirely disappeared. It was as if the pupil was alone on the white eyeball.

"Yah," he bawled, "You'll kill me! He! He! He! I've got you lashed, mate,

He fell back with a cry, the dart sticking in his chest.



he heard a low moaning sound. For a moment he lay with his eyes closed trying to remember where he was. Remembrance came to him with the force of a slap in the face. Eyes opened again, he tried to sit up. Something was holding his wrists with the long strips of rattan that had held the corpse to the boat! With a great effort he was able to raise his head, to peer toward the bow of the boat.

Irene Garver was lashed to the under side of the platform. More of the ragged clothing had been torn from her body and, squatted beside her, was Griggs, his red little eyes gloating over the sight of her palpitant flesh. Saliva ran unheeded from his blue lips, drooled over the stub-

and I've got all the weapons in this end of the boat. We'll die! Ay, we'll all die but Horace Griggs'll die happy! We're hungry and we're thirsty and we'll die of that, but all my life I've wanted a fine lady! And now—the captain's daughter!"

He threw himself toward the bound girl in an ecstasy of slobbering delight.

"Be still, you she-devil," he roared as the woman tried to fight herself away. "I'll cut your soft white throat, so help me!"

Moreland shuddered as he saw the stone knife in the madman's hand, saw its sharp point bite into the base of the white throat. The girl lay still, stiffened rigidly. The madman laughed. "This'll learn you!" He dragged the knife down across her collar bone into the yielding flesh below. The girl groaned. Moreland roared. Griggs laughed as the knife left a slender red wake from which oozed tiny gleaming globules of blood.

"Blood! Blood!" screamed Griggs. "He! He! He! Not blue but red like mine!"

Moreland strained at his bonds until he fell exhausted in the stern. For a long time there was silence from the bow of the boat. The girl, thought Moreland, has fainted, thank God. Then the silence was broken by the wheezing breathing of the madman, interspersed with stupid little giggles. Nauseated Moreland tried not to watch.

LONG hours later something sharp stuck him in the chest. He opened his eyes to see Griggs standing near the middle of the boat. He bore the stone axe in one hand, the long sharp spear in the other. A spear point was prodding Moreland.

"I'm gonna cut you loose, Sparks, and you're going to paddle us toward that



grey cloud. It looks like a shore line to me. The shore means something to eat. Don't forget I'll be standing over you with a spear and an axe if you try anything funny."

Over Grigg's shoulder Moreland could glimpse the inert body of Irene Garver. She lay motionless except for the steady rise and fall of her breasts. Her eyes were closed. Her cheeks were wet with tears.

"You don't want to head for shore, Griggs," he protested. "We'll be picked up out here sooner or later. We can stand it another day or so. A plane will be sent from Cooktown or Moresby. Hit the coast and they'll miss us. That's the Lost Coast, man, and it's full of cannibals. They'll scoff us all, mister!"

The sharpened spear head bit at the rattan bounds. Griggs drew back the spear, stood ready for action. "Get to paddling," he giggled. "I'm the skipper now and we're going ashore."

THE frail canoe couldn't have made it had it been ebb tide. A protecting barrier of reefs worse than any Moreland had ever encountered barred the shore. They shot through the gaps like a bullet from a gun, spray and spume

stinging their sunburned bodies. Ahead loomed trees. No land. It seemed as if the trees grew from the very sea itself and over all hung the sickening stench of mud.

Straight into the trees Moreland plunged the canoe. A flood of voracious mosquitoes engulfed them, flies and small insects arrived to taste fresh blood. Griggs cursed and slapped at his sore skin viciously. The sluggish current seemed to follow a lane of interlaced trees with spiral vines to tie them together. Huge trees stood out of the water, their gnarled roots upraised like pawing clawing fingers. A greenish twilight overhung the lanes and the air was redolent with rot and decay.

Griggs began to tremble and shake. "Take us out of here, Moreland," he whimpered. "It's dead, the whole thing! We'll die in here!"

Without a word Moreland turned the canoe about, headed back the way he had come. It took only a few minutes of paddling to show him how lost they were. The maze of muddy water swirled them beneath overhanging trees that looked exactly like others they had passed. Eventually he quit paddling.

Griggs screamed, raised the spear. "Work, you blighter! We've got to get out of here!"

"We're lost," said Moreland calmly. "The best thing to do is to drift. This muddy stream is bound to hit the sea somewhere."

"Look," said Griggs, peering toward the trees as the boat drifted into a small clearing. "Look! What is it?"

FIVE conical straw houses rose on stilts out of the mud. Three more were perilously perched in tall trees at the clearing edge. Even as the occupants

of the canoe watched, a bushy head appeared at the door of the tree house, a bushy head in which eyeballs were rolling whitely. A torrent of guttural dialect poured from the native's lips.

"Ahoy, ahoy," shouted Griggs, dancing up and down waving a spear. "Come get us; come and get us!"

Moreland dug in with the paddle. "You fool! Don't you know all these Papuan natives are cannibals? Do you want to be eaten?"

Griggs turned white, pointed the spear again at his shipmate. "Paddle, damn you." His voice was shaky with fear as he looked back over his shoulder. Tiny men were leaping from the stilt houses, others were clambering from the tree houses, all headed for dug out canoes. "Pygmies," groaned Moreland. Not a one of them was five feet in height. Each wore a solitary twisted garment of bark, or a single shell. As their canoes started in pursuit Moreland noted that they bore no weapons! He listened to the cry that came after them.

"*Mammoose! Mammoose! Ropatai!—Ropatai Mammoose!*" was as near as he could make out the words. Each black face was distorted in what was meant for a smile. He glimpsed pointed teeth, lips and molars black with betel nut. Then he heard the mad voice of Griggs again.

Griggs had clambered atop the raised platform, was dancing up and down brandishing the pointed spear as he mouthed curses. He drew back his arm, crouched like a discus hurler.

"Don't throw it," yelled Don and looked back at the pursuing pygmies. The canoe hit a projecting mangrove root. Griggs screamed wildly, tossed the spear over the side, and fell into the water with a great splash. Horror-

stricken Don paused, then saw something that caused him to leap into action.

From the protecting shelter of the big mangrove an enormous snout emerged. Two unblinking, piglike eyes were fixed directly on the struggling body of Griggs. The water rippled a little, the snout shot forward. Griggs saw the huge New Guinea alligator approaching and cried out in terror. Moreland fumbled on the bottom of the boat for the stone axe.

The beast opened its huge mouth. The stench of its breath came clear to Moreland as he clutched the axe. He saw the gleaming white tusks set in the blood red mouth as the jaws yawned wide to rend their living prey. Moreland hurled the axe as Grigg's scream echoed in the glade. Straight and true it sped into the red cavern. The *saurian* snorted, flipped on its side, and disappeared leaving a bloody wake.

The pygmies screamed, "*Mammoose, Mammoose!*" at the top of their voices, danced in their canoes. Moreland hauled Griggs aboard, searched for another weapon. The axe was gone, the spear was gone. His eye caught the heavy war club. He seized it, turned defiantly to the oncoming pygmies, determined to sell their lives as dearly as possible.

The tiny canoes gathered closer, the pygmies still pouring out a jargon of unintelligible gibberish. Don gripped the club. Irene Garver had found the knife and stood bravely beside him. Griggs cowered in the bottom of the boat.

"Ahoy, there! Ahoy!" The hail came from down the turgid river. Don stared unbelievably as another canoe hove into view, for, standing in the bow of the canoe, was a white man!

THE four days that followed were like a long delirious dream to Don More-

land. Fever raged and burned in his blood, his abused muscles and organs refused to function properly. When he finally opened his eyes to full consciousness, he stared straight upward into the brown ones of Irene Garver. She was holding a gourd filled with tepid water to his lips. Never before had he tasted anything so welcome, so soothing. He drank deep, closed his eyes then opened them to look about again.

No it wasn't a dream. It was really Irene. She wore a short native *sarong* of red calico that contrasted vividly with the whiteness of her skin. As she leaned over him to dab at his wet lips with a clean rag, the top of the shadowed cleft between her breasts was visible. The scent of the hibiscus flower she wore in her hair filled his nostrils. He smiled and she kissed him. Someone giggled in the background.

It was a native girl, as tall, as well rounded as Irene. She squatted in a corner pulling the cord of a *punkah* that waved above Moreland's head. Irene smiled. "That's Tuona, Tom's wife. Tuona, this is Don Moreland."

The girl giggled, tried unsuccessfully to say the name.

"And Tom, who's Tom?"

"The white man who rescued us, honey. He's a trader, been inside here for nearly a year. The natives think he's some sort of a god, but—"

"What happened to Griggs?"

Her face whitened, then turned red as she looked away. He squeezed her hand.

"The damned dog," he grated. "I'll see him hanging in a dock for what he did!"

"He's mad, Don. We shouldn't hate him so, poor fellow. He's still delirious in another hut. But here's Tom."

"Hello, young fellow, so you've

snapped out of it!" Tom Andrews stood all of six foot six in his sock feet and weighed in proportion. An enormous red beard hung down on his thick chest. His head was topped by a thatch of hair that matched the beard perfectly. He sat down beside Don's pallet. "The young lady here has told me most of your story but maybe you can fill in if you feel like it."

DON tried. He concluded with, "I don't understand it, Andrews. I'd always heard that pygmies were man-eaters but they came after us all smiles. Maybe they were grinning in anticipation of a full stomach."

Andrews roared with laughter. Before replying, he spoke to Tuona, "Better go see if the other fellow's all right, Tuona. He may want water or something." Then to Don. "You can thank that red hair for your escape, young fellow. Every native on this coast from the pygmies to the *Tugeri* think red hair brings luck. *Mammoose* they call it. They'd have captured you if they could, but they wouldn't have eaten you. They'd have kept you, so that your luck would stay with them. Now the young lady and your friend—I don't know about them! She *does* look sort of juicy! But you were safe."

Don laughed. "So that's how you get by, too! They figure red hair is *tabu*?"

Andrews nodded. "That and the fear of god I've put into them. This is bad country, man. I'm the only white man that ever managed to keep himself alive here. They're afraid of my *puri-puri*, my magic. Sometime I'll show you. I'm making a good thing of it though. Plenty of paradise skins from the pygmies and a few trinkets from the *Tugeri* and Sky people up the river. I—"

The sound of a sudden, penetrating

scream broke into the conversation. Don tensed, Andrews came slowly to his feet. Again that awful scream. With quick strides Andrews made the door. Don pulled himself up weakly, assisted by Irene. Together they made the door.

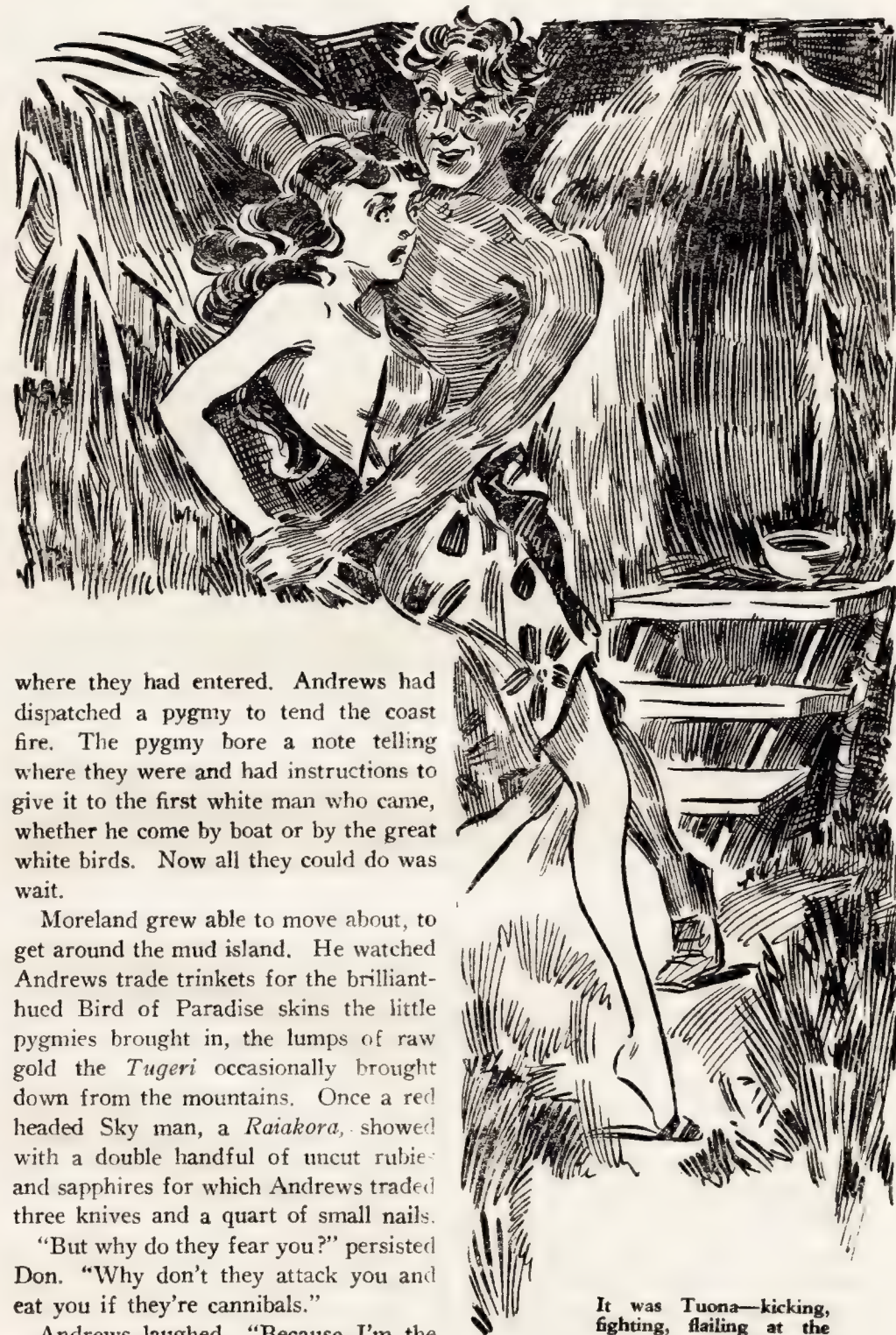
Some twenty feet away was another mud shack exactly like the one they were in. Andrews was almost there. Again that scream and a struggling figure leaped from the door, only to be pulled half in again by her captor.

It was Tuona, kicking, biting, flailing at the man who held her head in the crook of his arm. The man was Griggs, roaring with laughter, maddened with desire. He had torn the *sarong* from the girl's brown body. Her breasts bobbed and swayed pendulously, muscles rippled lithely in the fullness of her thighs and calves. As he glimpsed Andrews running approach, he hurled her behind him, crouched low to meet the attack of the giant, slobbering and whining.

Andrews walked in slowly, oblivious of kicks and blows that bounded off his huge body. He encircled little Griggs in his arms, smothered him in a brawny embrace and walked back into the shack with him. Presently he emerged, the naked, bleeding body of his native wife safe in his arms. Don and Irene made way for the man and his burden. Tuona wasn't hurt much, more frightened, but her man was grim.

"He's dangerous," he said, "as balmy as a bat and woman-crazy. Don't either of you go in there again."

DAYS passed, dragged by on weary legs. The fever burned itself out in Don Moreland. Irene explained what they had done about rescue. A smudge fire was constantly kept going on the mud island and another on the coast



where they had entered. Andrews had dispatched a pygmy to tend the coast fire. The pygmy bore a note telling where they were and had instructions to give it to the first white man who came, whether he come by boat or by the great white birds. Now all they could do was wait.

Moreland grew able to move about, to get around the mud island. He watched Andrews trade trinkets for the brilliant-hued Bird of Paradise skins the little pygmies brought in, the lumps of raw gold the *Tugeri* occasionally brought down from the mountains. Once a red headed Sky man, a *Raiakora*, showed with a double handful of uncut rubies and sapphires for which Andrews traded three knives and a quart of small nails.

"But why do they fear you?" persisted Don. "Why don't they attack you and eat you if they're cannibals?"

Andrews laughed. "Because I'm the

It was Tuona—kicking, fighting, flailing at the man who held her.

Thunder God, Don. Besides being *mammoose*, *tabu*. I'm the man that makes thunder. Haven't you ever wondered what these plungers were for?"

Against the wall of the *kampong* were three plungers set in cases. Don eyed them curiously. "I press them down, Don, and it thunders! Before I got into this business, I was a blaster down Australia way. I've got plenty of dynamite out there and it's all wired up. Whenever the cannibals get a little unruly I set off a charge. They think my *puri-puri* is tops, call me the Thunder God. I've got it wired in the same way to my boat down there." Andrews had a twenty-eight foot auxiliary sloop at anchor off the island—"and a real charge beneath the house where I live. That's just in case. If they ever really got to me where I wouldn't have a chance, I'd blow the whole works into the air. No cannibal stewpot for mine! And I've got plenty of dynamite and caps. That whole chest you're sitting on is filled with it."

IRENE grew restless. As days passed, she often went to see Griggs, to take him food and water which was thrust through the bars of his cage. At his insistence she brought Don one evening. Griggs peered through the bamboo bars, began to whine.

"Lord love me, mate, you're looking good. Listen. I'm all right now. I've been mad, it's the fever that had me, mate. You know I wouldn't do nawthing like that if I was myself. Can't you fellows let me out of here a little while. I'll behave myself! I'll—"

His words broke off, an odd glow came in his eyes. Don followed the direction of his gaze. Tuona, clad in a scanty *sarong*, was crossing the mud island. The firm line of her hips, the

rounded boldness of her brown breasts, the trim muscularity of her thighs! Griggs licked his lips, sighed deeply.

Don snorted and walked away. But Irene was sorry for the man. All unknown to Andrews or Moreland she agreed to let him out each night for exercise. His whining pleas for mercy grated on her ears but she saw no need to keep him locked up like a beast.

Again he sent for Don. Again the face against the bars. "Mate, mate," he babbled, "we're rich! Never mind how I know, but this Andrews has got a tow sack half filled with gems and I know where they're at. Hit him on the head, let me out, and we'll take his boat and beat it. I'll show you. I'll share, I'll—"

Again Don turned and walked away in disgust. That night he spoke to Andrews about rescue.

Andrews said, "I could take you out, Moreland. My boat is big enough to cross the Torres Straight and make Australia at Point Kennedy. But this is the chance of a lifetime right here for me. I'm going at rainy season. If they haven't sent a search party along the Lost Coast by that time, I'll take you. Give me three more months and I'll be a rich man."

SO MORELAND spent the ensuing days idling the time away with Irene. Daily he grew to look forward to the sight of her in the short *sarong* that was her only garment. The lush lines of her hips were liquid, thrilled him. And the day he took her in his arms, thrilled to the touch of her hot lips felt her rounded breasts flatten against him, he knew he had found his woman.

That same evening the pygmy who had been stationed at the coast dropped down from the tree tops. His tale was prodigious. A great white bird had de-

scended from the sky to see his smoke. A man had gotten out of the bird and came to the smoke in a boat. And he, Mora, the greatest pygmy of all had explained that the *Mammoose* was up the river with the white lady. He handed Andrews a note written on an envelope. It read:

"We have only a small plane. Will be back three days from now with a cabin plane to take you out. Meet us at river mouth where smudge was."

There was rejoicing on the mud island that night. Even the red jungle moon seemed to smile down on the happiness. Irene Garver felt so happy she let Griggs out of his shack and told him the good news. Griggs slobbered and whined in gratitude, but kept out of sight.

It was decided that Andrews should take them to the mouth of the river the following morning where they would lie at anchor until the rescuing plane appeared.

DON MORELAND went to sleep to dream of Irene Garver. The feel of her soft flesh pressing his was in that dream, the feel of her searching lips, her eager arms. He awakened to find Griggs, mad Griggs, standing over him with a Papuan war club poised over his head. He tried to twist aside. The blow caught him on the side of the head, dazed him. As if in a nightmare he felt his hands being lashed, his feet bound. Griggs squatted beside him giggling and laughing.

"Crazy am I, crazy? Go on and yell! Yell for Andrews! He's laying dead out there where I bashed his bloody brains out with a rock! And that woman of his, I've got her tied up like a pig for market! I've got your woman too, you fool. Two women Griggs has got!" He kicked Moreland and trotted out.

In a moment he returned, pushing the cringing Irene before him. Her *sarong* was torn, her body scratched and bruised where it was exposed. Long tapering legs gleamed in the moonlight.

"There he is," snickered Griggs, "there's your lover. Not so pretty now with the red blood on his face. Moreland, I've got two women and Andrews' gems. I'm taking his boat and meeting the plane that's coming for us. You're going to stay here with Andrews. He! He! He! Get going, sister!" He struck Irene viciously with his fist. She tottered, fell to her knees.

She whispered, "I'll have to go with him. He's mad. When the plane comes, I'll tell them you're still alive. Try to hold out."

Griggs had the keen ears of the insane. He rocked with laughter. "Sis, it may be a couple of days before that plane comes! You don't seem to understand. I'm taking you and Tuona along for pastime. But I'm gonna be the only survivor! You can count on that."

He kicked her out the door to the tune of Moreland's threats and curses.

There at the door he paused. "And don't depend on the pygmies rescuing you. Watch."

He reached for the plungers, pulled the first. Off in the distance a tremendous booming rent the air. Another plunger, another, till all three blasts of dynamite had been exhausted. "While you two fools talked, I listened," jibed the madman. "After those blasts no native will come within miles of this island for a year. So long, mate. Starving is a hell of a death. Get going, you white slut!"

His laughter floated back.

(Continued on page 106)

By
CLIVE TRENT

She was innocent and young looking—different from the painted women of the mining town bar-rooms. Yet . . . was she in with the gang who had murdered his partner?

DEATH TRAIL

DON KIRKE stood staring down at the water in incredulous horror. It couldn't be—and yet there was no mistaking that rusted metal watch-band on the skeleton wrist. It was the body of his partner, Tom Moreland, lying there, stranded in the shallows of Little Ghost River.

That thing had once been Tom, his partner in the rich alluvial gold-claim that they had discovered in the frozen North. That thing had once been alive, vital, eager, a boy of twenty-three, bubbling over with exuberance and energy. Now it was an almost fleshless skeleton.

And it had come back almost to their cabin door.

How far had it floated? How many weeks had it been on its way, bobbing and dancing grotesquely on the Spring flood, till it had been flung ashore, with the two fleshless palms outstretched, as if crying for vengeance?

At the New Year, when fires could hardly thaw the frozen gravel, and work had to be suspended, Tom had started south to spend the winter with his folks in Winnipeg, pack on back, and the poke of gold dust in it. For the two had made a clean-up, and they had a cache in the



With a bellow, Flinders swung the girl aloft. "She's mine, fellers!"

rocks beside the river, worth many thousands of dollars. Tom had waved from the doorway. "See you in the Spring," he called.

And now he had returned—like this?

FOR hours Don labored, thawing out the soil to dig a grave. Reverently he lowered the skeleton into the hole, shoveled back the earth and piled on stones. Into these he inserted a roughly

fashioned cross. Later the Mounties would dig up the body, but for the present Don had given his friend's body the sanctuary of mother earth.

Back in the cabin, Don stood brooding. He was convinced that Tom had been murdered for the dust he had taken with him. And Rascoe, seventy miles away, where the new gold rush had brought every evil character in the North-West, seemed the most likely

place where information might be had. For Tom must at least have reached Rascoe.

Rascoe was on the Siskataway, and the Little Ghost flowed into it. If Tom's body had been thrown into the Siskataway, the Spring freshets might have backed it up into the Little Ghost.

Don looked at the photograph of Tom's folks in Winnipeg, nailed to the cabin wall. A happy family group. Tom had wanted Don to come down and visit them. But Don had preferred to keep watch over their dust cache, and the solitude of the cabin. There had been a girl in his life, three years before, and, since she had broken faith with him, to marry a rich, elderly man, Don didn't want to meet people any more. Not the sort of folks Tom Moreland had.

Sometimes, rarely, when suppressed nature shrieked her claims, Don had gone south for a visit to some mining town, though he had never been to Rascoe, which had sprung up the preceding Summer. Then he would return with memories of a long drunken spree, and women he had loved and now hated, because they hadn't helped him to forget.

Don filled a poke of dust from the cache in the rocks, packed a little grub, looked about the shack. He buttoned his mackinaw and wrapped Tom's scarf about his neck. Tom's mother had made that scarf for him, and Tom had somehow left it behind him. Don locked up and hit the trail.

RASCOE was bedlam when Don checked in at the Diggers' Hotel at sundown. He rented a room, ate at a fly-spotted, cloth-topped table in the dining-room, and threw his poke down on the clerk's desk.

"Weigh out a hundred for me," he said.

Two or three tough-looking hombres, in what might have been called by courtesy the hotel lobby, were observing him rather closely, Don thought. But dust was the usual medium of currency, and Don wasn't worried by their interest in his poke. He could take care of himself. He took the bills, stowed away the rest of his dust, and stepped through the doorway into the dance-hall.

The Diggers' Hotel was only one of half-a-dozen places of the same character along the street, but it was the largest, and its noise drowned out the racket from the rest. A radio was blaring out dance-music, and along the whole length of the room, which was flanked by a long bar, miners, trappers, and all the riffraff of a mining town were thumping the floor with their heavy boots as they swung the painted dance-hall girls around.

At the bar, men were shouting, arguing, reeling. From behind a closed door came the rattle of poker chips and the slap of cards.

In the doorway of a room on the other side of the bar, where three bar-tenders were handing out drinks as fast as sleight of hand could slide the bottles and glasses across the mahogany, stood a huge man, apparently the proprietor, watching the scene.

Don ordered a whiskey, gulped it down. Then another, and another. It was his first taste of liquor in months, and it eased the tension in him, helped to shut out the memory of that hideous, bobbing thing at his cabin door.

Then he turned sharply at a light touch upon his arm. A girl was standing beside him, looking up at him with a smile.

A little thing whose head was hardly higher than his shoulder. A dark-haired girl with big gray eyes, small, firm

breasts clearly outlined beneath her sheer frock, which reached no lower than the knee. Long, shapely legs, the contours of slim hips, and a slender waist.

The frock was scarlet, making her a striking figure in the room. Without moving his eyes from her, Don was aware of the hard-faced hombres watching him from a corner of the room. But he wasn't thinking of them. He was astonished at this girl, not more than twenty-one or two, looking so different from the painted women who were careening round in the arms of the miners. Though her face was rouged too, she had a curious look of—innocence.

Like that other one, Don reflected bitterly. They were all the same, these women.

"Like to dance, miner?" she asked, smiling into Don's eyes. Then she nestled into his arms.

"**M**AYBE you'd rather sit down," she suggested, after they had danced for a few minutes. "Would you like to buy a bottle of champagne?"

Don smiled and assented. It was the old game, after all. They sat down at a little table, and Don gave the order to the waiter. "Bring me a whiskey too," he said.

"You're out for a spree, aren't you, miner?" asked the girl. She leaned toward him, and Don could feel the warmth of her as her shoulder touched his. The sweet fragrance of her came to him like a heady perfume.

And the devils in him tugged at their chains as he saw the beauty of her, the little rounded orbs beneath her frock, and the soft cleft between them.

"My name's Doris," she said.

"You can call me Mike."

"Mike? Is that your real name? Mike of where?"

"Mike of the whole damn' North-West," answered Don thickly. "Let's forget the names. I guess maybe we're going to like each other. But how do you come to be playing around here?"

She laughed softly. "I'm Big Joe's girl," she answered, with a glance at the huge proprietor. "Oh, don't look so disgusted. Joe's very nice to me, and he—he protects me, you see, because nobody dares get fresh with me. And one has to live, my dear."

The waiter brought the wine and filled their glasses. Also the whiskey, which Don tossed off first. God, he was beginning to live again! Tomorrow he would take up his quest. Not tonight. There was nothing he could do about Tom tonight.

But even the whiskey couldn't dull that sense of pity that he felt for Doris. Big Joe's girl!

She leaned toward Don again, and he could feel her rounded knee pressing his own beneath the table. "When are you going to begin asking me the regular questions?" she said.

"What questions?"

"Why the story of my life, and how I came to fall from a state of innocence, and what I'm doing here?"

"I'd like to know."

"Would you like me to take you somewhere?"

Yes, she was no different from all the other painted women there. Her eyes seemed curiously hard and calculating as she looked into his. Then she smiled again.

"Go out of that door, and wait for me," she said. "I don't want to get into trouble with Big Joe. Pretend you're through with me—see?"

SHE came out of the side entrance a minute later, smiled up at him, and made him a little gesture to follow her. She led the way along a narrow alley toward the rear of the hotel, where, instead of the kitchen, were a number of little rooms opening off a corridor. Deftly she unlocked one of them, and slipped inside, and Don followed her.

There was barely room for two persons inside, and the walls were of thin pine planking. The interior was faintly lit by the lights of the hotel, shining through a pane of glass. The immediate room on either side seemed empty, but Don could hear the drunken tones of men somewhere along the row, and women's shrilling laughter. Doris turned.

"Well?" she asked. "Do you want to ask me about my past now or—later?"

"I guess the questions can wait," laughed Don, drawing her to him.

The liquor made the room swim, and he was conscious of nothing but the girl's presence, the beauty, warmth, and fragrance of her. God, what a woman's company meant, even though the love was bought, after those lonely months! His hands shook as they touched her.

Then her frock had fallen, and she stood before him in a short slip that revealed the whole lovely contours of her, her shoulders bare, one breast half revealed, the other threatening to slide loose from the sheer material. Don drew her into his arms and pressed his lips hungrily to hers.

But she shivered violently, and pushed him away. There was a look of fear on her face, as if she were a pure girl, as if she wasn't—what she obviously was.

"What's the matter?"

"Tell me your real name, and where you come from," she whispered.

"Why do you want to know?"

"Just because."

"Oh, hell, I'm Don Kirke, and I come from Little Ghost River," mumbled Don.

"Don Kirke!" She shuddered. And just then there came a rush along the passage, and Don whirled as three men burst in.

HE dashed his fist into the face of the foremost, and sent him crashing back against the pine partition with a force that shivered it from top to bottom. Then something hard and heavy dropped on his skull from behind, and his knees began to sag.

He swung again and again, however, connecting each time, but his blows seemed to fall as light as thistledown. Grunting, cursing, the four struggled in the little room, and all the while Don could hear the girl screaming in the passage. But he knew that she had tricked him for the sake of the poke of gold dust.

Again he heard, rather than felt, the impact of that weapon on his head. A million lights whirled before his eyes, and he passed out—cold.

THE sense of movement and the sound of lapping waves were the first things he was aware of when he came back to consciousness. He opened his eyes, to find himself staring up at the gray sky in broad daylight. He was lying in a flat-bottomed scow, which was drifting down the swirling river between forests of evergreens. Two men were in the scow with him, one at the stern-sweep the other seated at the prow.

Don sat up with an effort, staring at them in bewilderment. They wore the Summer uniforms of the Royal Mounted, the brown serge jackets and blue trousers with the yellow stripe.

At his movement, the man in the prow

shouted to his companion at the sweep, and came over to him.

"Well, how're you feeling now, Kirke?" he sneered.

"Water!" gasped Don.



The door crashed and three men whirled in. Don tensed for the battle.

"Water? Sure. After you've talked."

But Don had dropped back limply, for his throat was an oven, and his head was aching as if it was ready to split. His pulses kept up an infernal throbbing in his ears, and he was as weak as an infant.

"Give him a drink, Charley," said the man at the sweep. "He'll talk all right."

It was only when the canteen was handed to him that Don realized he was handcuffed. He drank greedily, then

shifted his cramped limbs and sat up again, leaning against a bulwark. He looked at the two Mounties. They had the faces of gangsters, rather than of policemen.

"Where are you taking me?" Don asked. "What am I arrested for?"

"It's you who's taking us," grinned the man Charley, his swarthy features relaxing in a leer. "Back to that cabin of yours somewhere on the Little Ghost. We'd have got you next month, if you hadn't shown up at Rascoe. We been laying for you there."

Don realized that his belt, with the dust, was gone.

"I don't know what it's all about," he

said thickly. "I was attacked and robbed in that hotel. I don't remember anything after that."

"Yeah? Well, you was with one of them women, and we could take you in for that. But we're dropping that charge. You were recognized, and you resisted arrest while we were being sent for. They had to knock you out." He thrust his ill-favored face into Don's. "You're under arrest for the murder of your partner, Tom Moreland," he grinned.

"You're crazy! I went to Rascoe to find who'd murdered him."

"Yeah? Sounds pretty. But we got you, Kirke, and we're taking you back to your cabin to look for evidence. You're going to show us where it is, or it'll be too bad for you, because we'll find it anyhow."

ON the third afternoon the scow, propelled by oars, backed up the Little Ghost stream opposite the cabin.

Don had expostulated, argued, told his story, to be met with sneering incredulity. And he had never met two members of the Force like Charley and his companion, Peterson, still more repulsive in appearance, with a red thatch and a great scar across his dirty cheek. Hand-cuffed to the sweep at night, he watched the two drink themselves into a state of roaring intoxication. Sometimes one of them would offer him whiskey, but Don declined.

His strength was coming back, however, and he had noticed that his hand-cuffs were of an old-fashioned kind, the separate cuffs that enclosed each hand being connected by a short, rusty chain.

Old cuffs—and that was curious, and a chain that was so rust-eaten that it might be snapped, perhaps, if some desperate effort were required.

On the second night, after a low, mut-

tered argument between the two, they came staggering up toward the stern, where Don was lying.

"Well, feller," said Peterson, "I guess you ain't looking forward to dancing on the air exactly. How about fixing this business?"

"What d'you mean?"

The two looked at each other. "Meaning," said Peterson, "your partner, who you murdered, had a poke full of dust when he come into Rascoe. And you had another. You killed him because there was plenty more dust cached away, which you wanted. We might fix things, if you show us where it is."

"So that's your game! And you call yourselves members of the Mounted?"

"It's that or swing, feller."

"To hell with you, you dirty crooks!"

Peterson punched Don in the jaw, then kicked him. But Charley intervened. "No need to git rough till we git him up there," he said. "He'll talk then."

Don had already instructed the pair as to the location of the cabin.

The scow dropped her anchor in the current opposite the cabin in mid-afternoon. Don was hauled out and flung upon the bank. And Tom's grave was only a few yards away. The men looked at it, jeering coarsely.

"So that's where you buried him, is it?" asked Charley. "Brung him back by boat after you knifed him in Rascoe, huh? And put a cross over him? Haw, haw!"

They roared with laughter and swigged at their bottles again. "Where's that cache, cully?" asked Charley.

"Find it," said Don.

They kicked him brutally, and beat him about the head, but Don remained silent.

"Aw, come on, Charley," said Peterson. "We'll find it."

Don could hear them tearing up the boards of the floor. They all but tore the cabin apart in their fury. Half an hour later they came staggering out, blind with rage.

"Burn the —'s feet till he tells, Charley. We got to get it quick before—"

"Shut up, you fool!"

"Gawd, lookit there!"

A second scow was backing up the Little Ghost. The two men watched, cursing, as it came to anchor opposite the cabin. Two men got out.

"'Lo fellers!" they called.

"'Lo fellers!" they hailed.

"'Lo Benny! 'Lo Flinders!"

Don recognized two of the hard-faced hombres from the hotel in Rascoe. Then suddenly he understood. The two men in the uniforms of Mounties were crooks who had no right to wear that uniform. And the four were after the cache of dust. And, as soon as they discovered it, Don's life wouldn't be worth the tiniest pinch of it.

"**W**ON'T talk, huh? Make him talk!"

They dragged him to his feet, knocked him down, kicked him, pulled him up again, and struck him over the head with their revolver butts.

"Hey let up! Want to croak the feller?" roared Flinders, a thickset, bow-legged man with arms as long as an ape's. "We'll roast his feet. That's sure."

"Say, listen," put in Benny, a pink-eyed albino. "That grave's where he says he buried his partner. You believe that bunk? That's the cache, fellers."

In a moment Don was forgotten, and the four, seizing picks and shovels, were busy desecrating Tom's grave. They drank as they worked, staggered against

one another, cursed as they drove their picks into the earth, which had frozen since Don's departure. The sun was setting. Don lay, trying to pull himself together. There was a grating feeling in his side, as if a rib had been broken, and he was still dazed from the blows upon his head. But to attempt to escape would draw instant notice—until night fell. If the four crooks couldn't finish their job by nightfall, if they got drunker, there might be a chance. . . .

"Watch the sucker, some one!" roared Peterson.

Don lay very still. The sun was beneath the horizon now, and still the four were laboring at the frozen earth. If they discovered Tom's skeleton, and realized that their work had been for nothing, Don guessed that they wouldn't wait for him to disclose the secret of the cache, not fifty yards away. Death would come swiftly.

His strength was coming back. He was furtively trying to snap the cuff chain, tensing his wrists and pulling, but it held, rust-eaten though it was.

Flinders cursed savagely as he shoveled up the loosened earth. They were some way beneath the surface now. At any moment they might come upon Tom's body.

And, with death some minutes away, at most, Don was thinking of the girl, Doris. Damned little stalling crook, of course she'd been the bait the gang had set for him!

No better than the rest of them, but no worse. If only he'd taken her, instead of letting her stall! And, racked with pain, and still struggling back to full consciousness, Don saw her lovely form again, the small breast that had almost broken free from the slip, and cursed himself.

THEN he saw another figure come into sight along the trail that ran beside the Little Ghost, upon the other side of Tom's grave. A little, limping figure, that stopped suddenly, and stood still. It was Doris herself!

She was still wearing the scarlet frock, but now it was a thing of shreds and tatters. Her head was hatless, and her bobbed hair fell about her ears. Her dress was splashed with mud, and she was bare-footed and bare-legged, save for a wisp of stocking that still clung to one calf.

As she stopped, the four caught sight of her, and simultaneously, with loud yells, they dropped their picks and shovels and ran toward her.

Don saw her turn and try to flee. But in another moment she was in their hands. Screaming, struggling, she fought them, while they guffawed with drunken laughter. The remnants of the frock were torn from her body. They pawed at her, fought over her, tore the slip from her shoulders. In the bright light that was reflected from the reddening sky, Don could see her trying to shield her soft breasts, heard her gasping cries of appeal. Then suddenly she collapsed and hung limp in the midst of them.

With a bellow like a bull, Flinders picked the girl up in his arms and swung her aloft. "She's mine, fellers, see?" he roared. "Afterwards you can toss for her. Keep your eyes on that sucker, Kirke; case he wakes up and scrams. So you walked up alone to see the boy friend, hey, baby?" he addressed the girl. "Well, Big Joe ain't here now, and I'm going to take what I been wanting, see?"

He strode with the limp form of the girl in his arms toward the hut. But the three others ran snarling after him. They were mad drunk, fighting drunk.

At the edge of the grave one of them stooped, picked up an empty whiskey bottle, and threw it at Flinders. It struck him on the head, and, as he reeled, the girl seemed to regain consciousness, and slipped from his arms. She tried to run, tottered, collapsed just as the three others were upon her.

They flung themselves at her, tearing away the rags of the slip that covered her, and leaving nothing but a pair of gauzy step-ins. She screamed again, but faintly; then the man Charley had snatched her up and stumbled with her inside the wrecked hut, while the two others followed and tried to grapple with him.

It was a scene of hell, the three ruffians fighting for possession of the girl, and Flinders reeling, cursing, and half-stunned, outside.

DON's strength had come back to him as if by a miracle. He had forgotten all about his broken rib, his aching sides, the blows upon his head. He got upon his feet, and, as he did, so, he heard an agonizing scream from within the hut, followed by a muffled choking.

With that, Don went mad. He tensed the muscles of his forearms and strove desperately to break the rusted chain. Once, twice, and the steel cuffs bit viciously into his wrists, grinding against the bones. Thrice—and the cuffs flew apart. His hands were free.

He was hardly more than fifteen seconds behind the gang when he precipitated himself into that human hell.

The cabin was a wreck. Half the floor was gone, carrying down Tom's bunk, which stood tilted sideways upon the ground beneath. At the other end of the cabin, the man Charley was holding Doris down upon the bunk, and fighting back the others. Her step-ins had been

torn to a few twisted rags, and the lovely whiteness of her was disfigured with red bruises and marred with smudges from filthy hands; she was trying to tear one of Charley's hands from her,

Don saw her raise her puny fist, flash it downward . . . and there was a knife in it.



and fighting, fighting. And that look upon her face was something that Don had never dreamed could appear on any woman's face, the desperation, the despair. . . .

As Don leaped inside the cabin, he saw Benny's arm fling forward, and next instant a knife was quivering in the cabin door within an inch of Charley's head. Charley never knew. Cursing, he released the girl and dealt Peterson a blow that knocked him to the tilting floor, where he sat, mumbling oaths, and groggy-eyed. And then Don had sprung.

He had never fought with a knife before, and under usual circumstances the idea would have been revolting to him.

Now he saw in this leering beast only a mass of flesh to be slashed into ribbons. Some primeval instinct took possession of him as he sprang.

Charley turned from the prostrate man, flung out his arm—too late. Don's knife went home into his throat so hard that Don's wrist was jarred by the impact upon the skull behind. With a shriek, Charley toppled forward, spewing blood from the gaping wound down through the tilted boards, stumbled and dropped.

Gasping wheezes came from his throat as he coughed out his evil life.

"Look out!" That was Doris's scream. And Don swerved instinctively just as

two slugs crashed from Benny's revolver into the planking by his head.

Don leaped, and the man pulled trigger again. The slug grazed Don's cheek. He stumbled, and went down through the broken planking, tangled in a heap with the albino.

DON brought his cuffed wrists down upon Benny's head, eliciting a howl of anguish. He felt by the man's movements in the darkening hut that he was groping for his revolver, six inches beneath him in the dirt. If Benny found that gun, it would be just too bad for Don. But he brought down his wrists with all his force into the man's upturned face twice more, and felt pulp instead of flesh beneath them.

Then a faint scream from Doris brought him around. She was struggling now with Peterson, who had risen from the floor. And yet somehow Don found the time to bring down the cuffs twice more upon the face of the thing beneath him, and heard its whimpers die away in a last gasp of death.

He was caught in the splintered boards. Dimly he could see Doris still fighting Peterson. And then, before he was free, the great, bowed form of Flinders sprang through the entrance, and a revolver butt crash down on Peterson's skull and stretched him out senseless.

At that moment Don gained his feet. Flinders turned and saw him. He flung the revolver into Don's face, and, as Don staggered, with a savage, bestial cry Flinders leaped at him and grasped him about the throat with his two hands.

Don beat him in the face without the least effect. His blows might have fallen upon resilient rubber. Flinder's hands were about Don's throat, searching for the carotids, to shut off consciousness, with the trained knowledge of the north

woods fighter. And in that deadly grip Don was powerless. He felt his senses leaving him again. His blows grew fainter. In the darkness he could just make out the leering, animal face, inflamed with liquor, lust, and murder.

Then, behind Flinders, Don saw the girl, her puny fist raised to strike him from behind. And he tried to call out to her, to warn her to escape, to tell her that he was at the end of his rope, but no sound came from his throat, constricted till his windpipe was like a flattened tube.

Then the girl's hand rose and dropped, rose and dropped again. A scream broke from Flinder's lips as, releasing Don, he tried to turn. And again, and yet again—and now Don, panting, gasping, could see the knife in it. Again, again, until the man was a sagging, dying hulk of flesh upon the floor.

"Hands up, all of you, and come out one by one!"

That voice that rasped from the door came from another man in Mountry uniform. Beside him Don could see the huge outlines of Big Joe.

"They're all dead," screamed Doris hysterically. "All dead but Don Kirke. Oh, Joe, God bless you and this policeman!"

Don felt the girl's warm body sag in his arms as he staggered toward the bunk and pulled away a blanket to cover her.

THE Mountry, a real one this time, was gone with Peterson, and Big Joe had departed to bring back some clothes for Doris. Before the corporal departed, certain things were made clear.

"That gang knifed your partner, Kirke, and dumped him into the Siskataway," he said. "We've had the evidence for weeks. We were waiting to round

them up. Peterson will swing. I'm taking the bodies in by scow for evidence—and it ain't what I'd call a pleasant job. We'll want you later as a witness, but I guess you won't run away."

But it was two days later before Doris, sitting up in her bunk, wrapped in the blanket, was able to explain. During those two days Don, battered and bruised as he was, had cared for her and nursed her back to sanity.

"You don't even know who I am yet, do you, Don?" asked the girl. "Tom's sister, Helen. Didn't he ever speak about me?"

"Helen! Of course! He wanted me to come down and meet your folks. God, why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I didn't know who you were. You see, poor Tom was robbed and stabbed to death in Rascoe. That night his body vanished, but Big Joe got word to my dad. Big Joe was a good friend of his years ago. Dad's recovering from a stroke, and couldn't come. So I insisted on coming myself. I went to Rascoe, and, by pretending to be Joe's girl, which of course I never was, I was able to do some detective work.

"I knew those men were crooks, but they pulled the wool over my eyes and made me think the murder had been committed by a stranger. Meanwhile the Police were working on the case. Then, when you came in that night, wearing Tom's scarf, I jumped to the conclusion that it was you who had murdered him. Those men told me that if I could hold you for a while, they'd get two Mounties who were expected in town that night. I—I was so desperate to avenge Tom that I let you think I was—"

"Go on, dear," said Tom softly.

"Well, I thought those were the real Mounties who took you away. I didn't dream the whole four were crooks who had murdered Tom and wanted the rest of the dust. But meanwhile I'd learned who you were, and I was so scared that you'd try to escape and be shot dead, I started off on foot, just as I was, for this cabin. Poor Tom had often told me where it was. Dear Joe must have learned, and started off with one of the real policemen. And—and you know the rest."

Don, seated on the bunk, slipped his arm around the blanketed figure.

"Helen—I love your real name, darling—I want to marry you. After all this we've got to—to live our lives together. Will you?"

She laid her head upon his shoulder and sighed deeply. "Can you believe, after that night, that I'm—I'm good?" she whispered.

"I'm the one who's ashamed." He raised her hand to his lips. "Precious one, I'm going to give you proof of the way I honor you. Here you and I are alone, and I'm going to keep you wrapped up from chin to toe in that blanket till Joe comes with your clothes. Now do you believe I honor you?"

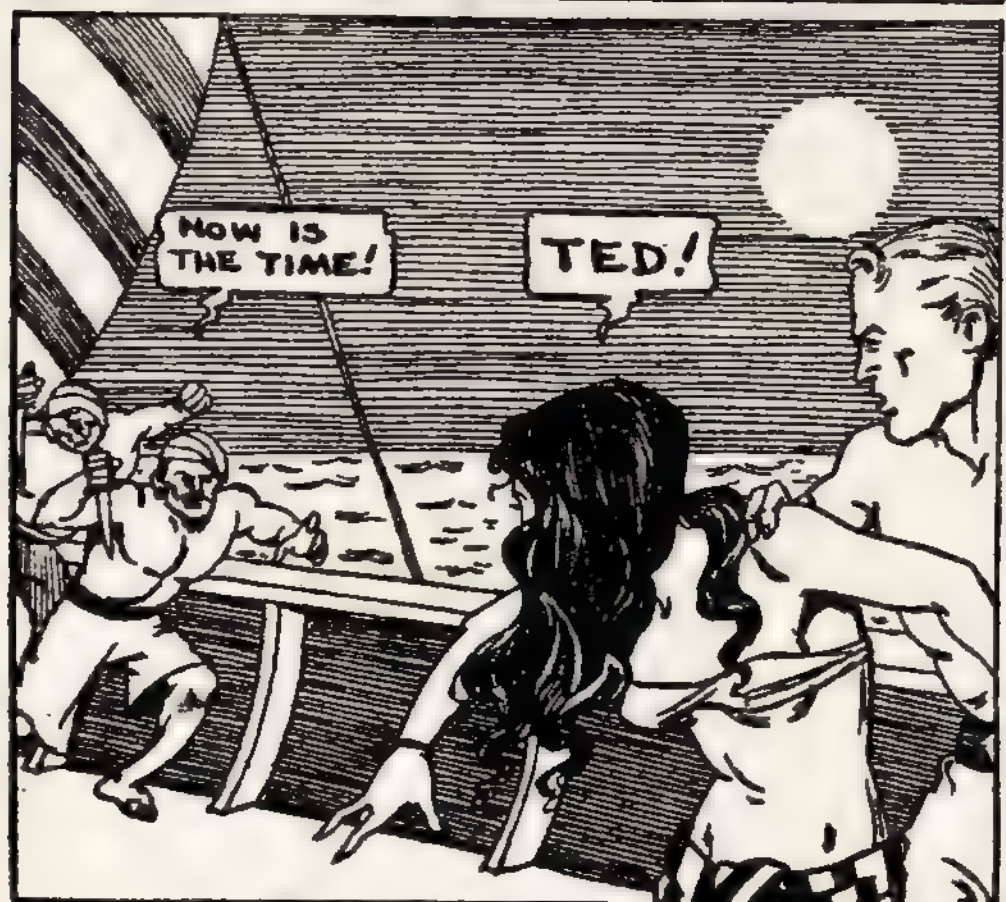
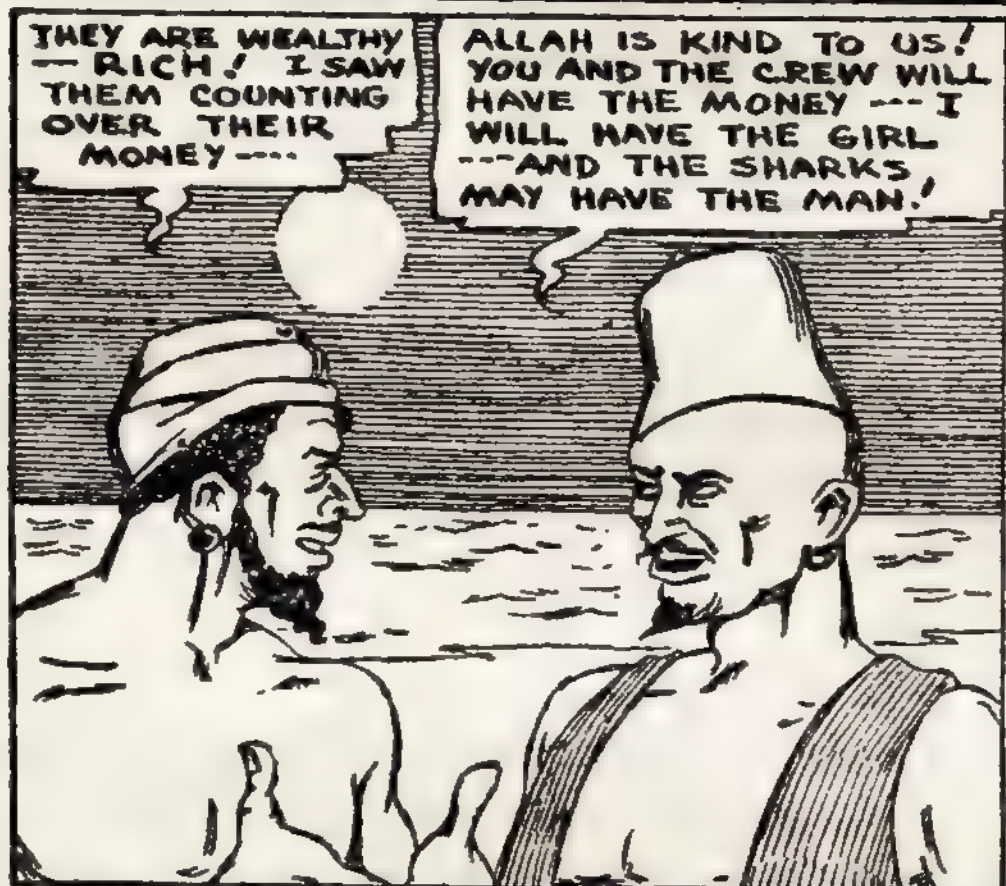
There was a wriggling movement in the blanket, and two bare arms emerged and wound themselves about Don's neck.

"It isn't—absolutely necessary, darling," whispered the girl. "Because we belonged from the first moment we met, didn't we? There! There's the knot. You tied me up as if I was a poke of gold dust, didn't you, darling?"

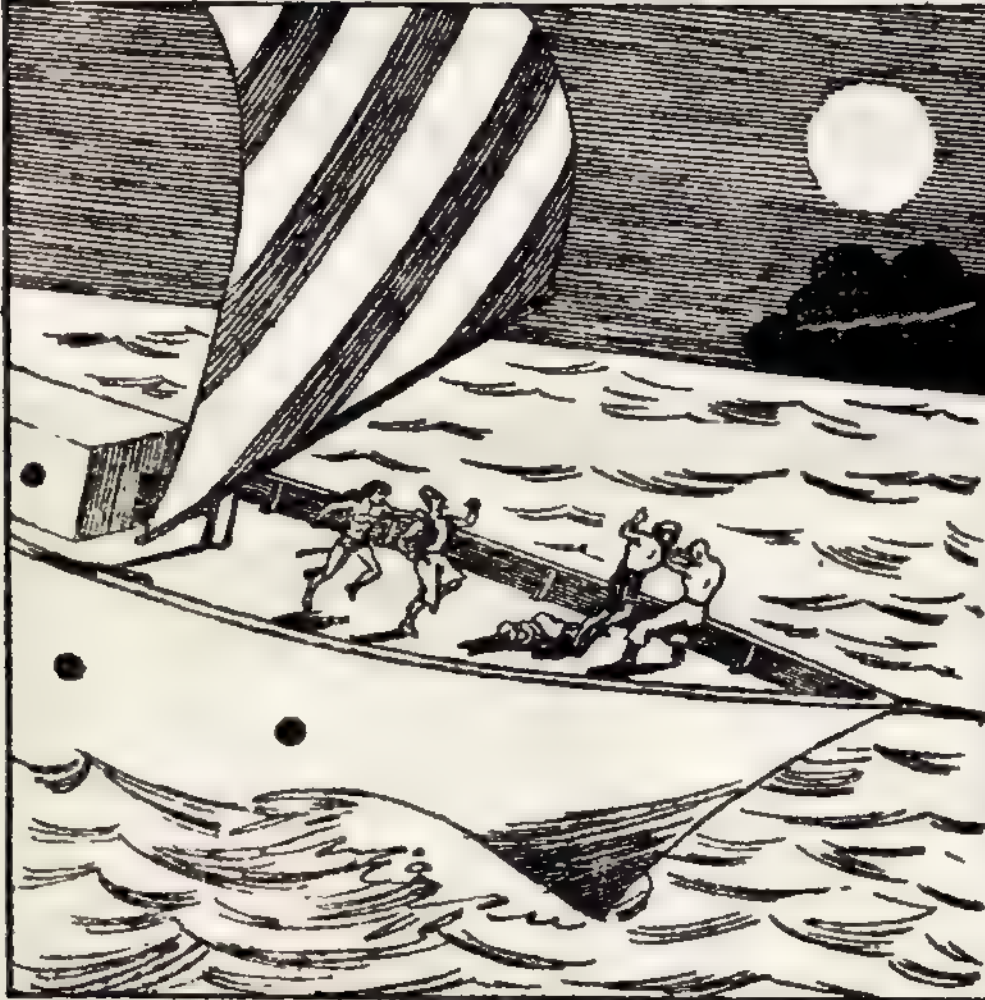
Diana Daw

DIANA DAW AND TED MORTON, ARRIVE ON THE SHORE OF THE ARABIAN SEA, WHERE THEY FIND A GROUP OF BOATMEN REPAIRING A SMALL VESSEL

By CLAYTON MAXWELL



DIANA STABS THE CAPTAIN IN THE BACK AND
SNATCHES HIS PISTOL

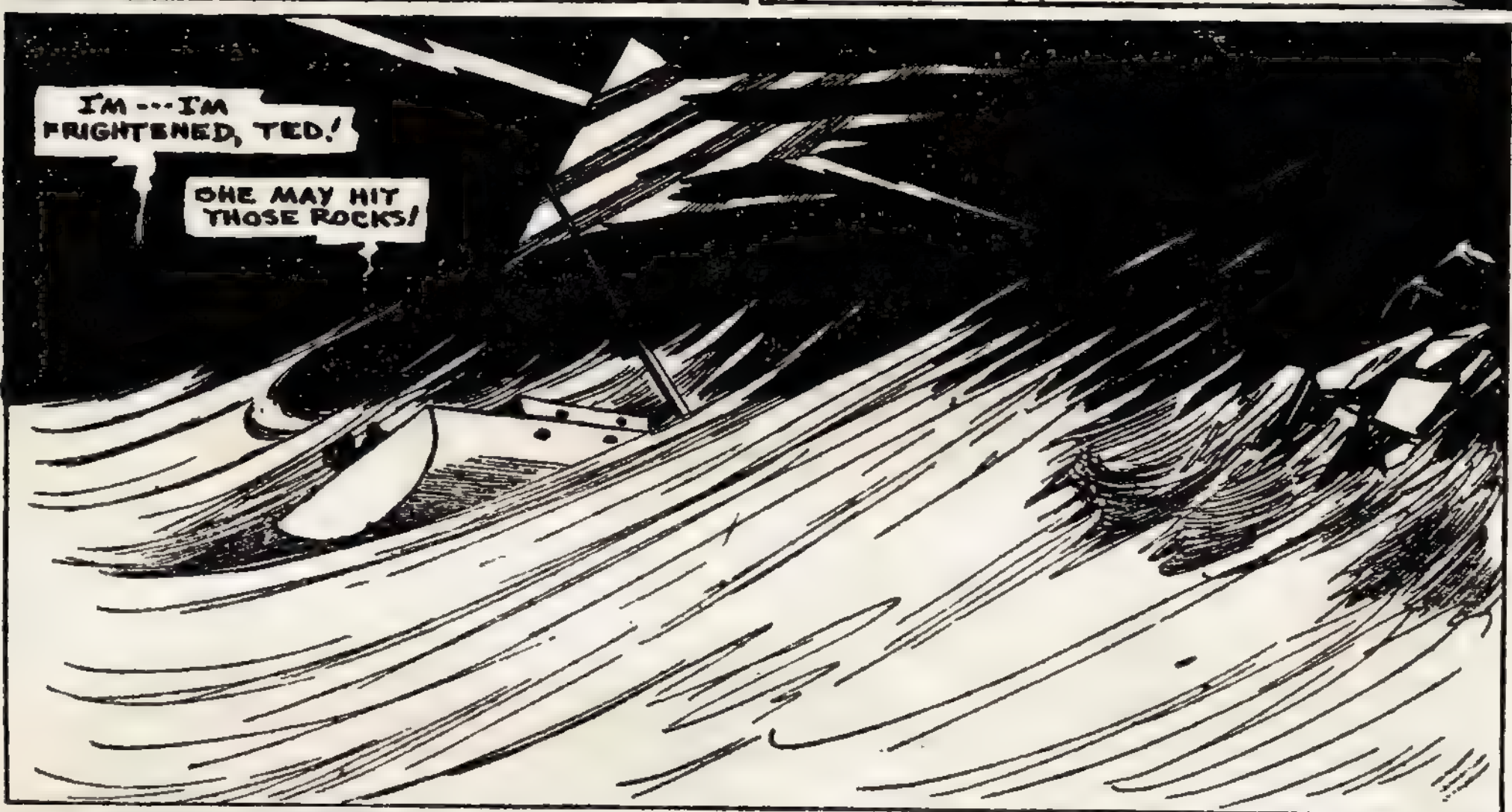


NICE WORK, DIANA--
THAT FINISHES
THEM!



I'M --- I'M
FRIGHTENED, TED!

ONE MAY HIT
THOSE ROCKS!



MY STRENGTH IS
ABOUT GONE!

I'LL HELP YOU -- THE
SHIP LOOKS FINISH-
ED -- LUCKY WE
JUMPED OFF!



THANKS,
TED!

GOT HERE ---
JUST IN TIME
--- I'M ABOUT
DONE UP
MYSELF!



WHAT HAPPENS TO TED AND DIANA ON
THIS ISLAND IN THE ARABIAN SEA? SEE THE
OCTOBER ISSUE OF SPICY ADVENTURE STORIES

Why couldn't the girl have told Dan that she was his friend's wife? Dan was willing to sacrifice his life for Hank—even for Hank's secret formula. . . . And now, unknowing, he was about to do his friend the greatest injury of all. . . .



CARBOY

THE possibility of danger was far from Dan Landon's mind when he dismounted. Late afternoon sunlight, filtering through the trees, made highlights and shadows on his rugged,

rough-hewn features as he tethered his horse.

He approached the little mountain cabin just ahead. The tang of September was in the high Sierra air; and Dan



One Asiatic turned the valve. The gas was flowing into the glass chamber!

**By ROBERT
LESLIE BELLEM**

of DEATH

Landon smiled. It would be good to see Hank Merriman again after all these years.

Approaching the sprawled, rambling log shack, Landon noticed that the front

door was partially open. He stepped inside; raised his voice. "Hello, Hank," he called out.

And then he stopped, bewildered. There was a dark-eyed, olive-skinned

girl sitting at a desk at the opposite side of the cabin's front room. She had been poring through a sheaf of papers; had evidently been too engrossed in her task to hear Dan Landon's approach. But now, hearing his call, she whirled around. Like lightning, her slender hand darted out; snatched up a heavy Luger automatic from the desk.

She trained the weapon's ominous black muzzle at Dan Landon's heart. "Up!" she commanded harshly. "Get your hands up into the air, *señor*, or I shall keel you!"

Landon's arms went slowly upward over his head. "What the devil!" he whispered.

SHE was young; and she was beautiful with an exotic Latin loveliness. Her skin was dusk-ivory; her eyes long-lashed and slumbrous. Her lips were red and kiss-inviting; her hair the blue-black of a tropic midnight.

Dan Landon's eyes drank in the lithe contours of her body; lingered on the magnificently-firm breasts that strained at the confinement of her thin silken frock. Her hips were ultra-feminine; her thighs were symmetrical columns of perfect proportions. Her chiffon-sheathed legs and ankles were slim, patrician.

Looking at the girl, Dan Landon thought of her as a splendid female cat-animal, lithe and swift and somehow deadly. Yet despite this air of danger, he sensed about her an aura of invitation that stirred a sudden desire within his veins.

And then she spoke once more. "Who are you?" she demanded. "Speak, before I decide to pull thees trigger!"

With bold calmness, Dan Landon met her stare. "The name," he answered, "is Dan Landon. If I have intruded, I'm

sorry. I thought this was the cabin of Hank Merriman."

The girl's dark-glowing eyes narrowed. "What do you want of *Señor* Merriman?"

"I don't want anything of him. He's an old friend of mine; I haven't seen him in years. I had a letter from him the other day, inviting me up here to visit him at his mountain laboratory." Dan hesitated, smiled faintly. "Quite evidently I came to the wrong place. Can you tell me where I might find Mr. Merriman?"

"Thees ees hees cabin," the girl said slowly. "But *Señor* Merriman ees not here. He have gone to the ceety for chemical supplies."

"Gone to the city, eh? Will he be back soon?"

"Why do you ask, *señor*?"

Dan Landon grinned engagingly. "I was hoping he'd hurry back—so that I wouldn't have to stand here too long with my hands in the air. The posture's rather uncomfortable."

The girl took a step toward him. She moved lightly, gracefully, with a sinuous and liquid quality to her muscles. "You say you have a letter from *Señor* Merriman inviting you to thees place. Ees thees letter with you, perhaps?"

"Of course." Landon started to lower his hands; to reach into the breast pocket of his leather coat.

The girl came closer. "Keep the arms up!" she whispered warningly. "Me, I weel find thees letter myself." And with her free hand she burrowed into Landon's coat.

The nearness of her, the touch of her fingers upon his chest, did queer things to Dan Landon. He could feel a surging wave of sensation leaping through his veins; and her faint perfume assailed his nostrils like an intoxicating and heady

wine. He could see the beginning of the soft valley between her enticing, cream-smooth breasts—a valley daringly exposed by the low-cut neck of her frock.

For an instant, the sight filled him with an almost uncontrollable impulse to sweep her into his hard arms, crush her against him. It was a savage, atavistic call, his desire to conquer her. . . .

But she held the Luger's muzzle jammed unwaveringly against his ribs; and he read grim purpose in her dark, flashing eyes. She was a dangerous creature. And Dan Landon lived for danger; which made this dark-haired girl all the more intriguing. . . .

SHE had extracted the contents of his inner pocket. Now she came upon a letter addressed in the clear, bold handwriting of Hank Merriman. With her one free hand she managed to extract the letter from its envelope.

Dan Landon remembered the note's contents:

"Dear Dan:

You'll probably be quite surprised to hear from me after all these years. I have a mountain cabin in the Sierras back of Big Fork, complete with laboratory. I've just completed a certain chemical experiment of unusual importance—a poison gas. Wish you could manage to come up to my place this week-end. I'd like to chin with you—and there's a chance I might need your help. Enclosed find a map showing how to reach my diggings.

Hank Merriman."

Dan Landon watched her as she read. Then, slowly, her stiffness seemed to relax. She lowered the Luger from Landon's ribs, and a faintly apologetic smile came to her ripe crimson lips.

"You must forgive me, *Señor Landon*," she whispered. "I see I have made a big mistake when I suspect you of be-

ing an enemy." She tossed the Luger back to the desk. "I must explain my actions, or else you will no doubt think I am a crazy person, no?"

Landon shrugged. "Not crazy, my dear. Just impetuous." He looked boldly into her dark eyes. "I like my women to be that way."

She flushed a little; laughed coquettishly. "Me, I am Lola Lopez. I am *Señor Merriman's* laboratory assistant. I have been working with them on these experiments here."

"Working on the poison gas?"

"Si. Yes. Your friend has developed this new formula for war gas very terrible, very deadly. *Señor Merriman* has secret agents of other countries have found out about this gas. He is afraid they come here, steal his formula. When he goes to the city this morning, he will warn me to be on guard against interlopers. Me, I am a nervous person. When I hear you enter this cabin, I will point gun at you. Now *Señor Dan*, you will forgive Lola Lopez?"

Landon laughed. "Of course. I don't blame you a damned bit. The next question is, when will Merriman be back?"

"I expect him tonight. You will remain here and wait for him?"

"If I may."

"Good! I will prepare the supper, and we will eat. Let us see time for you to go down soon, no?"

Dan Landon nodded. "Right. And while you're getting up the meal, I'll have a look around outside." He moved easily from the cabin; walked out into the swiftly-gathering mountain dusk.

Two hundred yards away from the house, he came upon the dead man.

THE corpse was that of a huge, hulking negro; and the man's black, mus-

cular throat had been sliced open from ear to ear.

The body had been roughly concealed beneath a bank of fallen autumn leaves; and by sheer chance, a stray gust of breeze had drifted some of the leaves away from an outstretched, stiffened black hand.

"Good God!" Landon rasped. He went to his knees; swept away the leaves until he had completely uncovered the negro's rigid, mutilated cadaver.

He sprang upright, raced back toward Merriman's cabin. He raised his voice harshly, commandingly "*Señorita Lopez—Lola!*"

The dark-eyed Mexican girl appeared at the doorway. "What ees eet?" she spoke sharply.

"Come here. I want to show you something." Landon grabbed her arm, led her to the spot where he had made his gruesome discovery. He pointed to the corpse. "Look!"

Lola Lopez paled. "*Madre de Dios!*" she whispered. "Eet ees Christopher—!"

"Christopher? You knew this black man?"

"*Si*—yes! He ees—he was *Señor Merriman's* servant! He was left here to guard the cabin!"

"Then Merriman was correct in his suspicions!" Landon muttered. "Someone is skulking in this neighborhood to steal that formula! They killed this black boy to make the coast clearer!"

"*Sangre de Dios!*" the girl wailed. Her hand went to her mouth; her eyes widened. "And we have left the cabin unguarded!" She turned; raced back toward the log shack.

Landon hurled himself after her, overtook her, grabbed her by the shoulders. "Keep away!" he barked. "I'll go in and have a look around. If anyone has sneaked in there, I'll handle him!"

He flung the girl aside, smashed himself into Merriman's cabin. There was nobody to be found in the front room. Landon grabbed up the Luger from the desk, entered a smaller side-chamber.

It was a well-equipped miniature laboratory, replete with retorts, Bunsen burners, glass stills, carboys, test-tubes and strange-looking chemical apparatus. But there were no traces of a prowler. . .

Swiftly, Dan examined the two remaining rooms of the cabin—twin tiny bedrooms. Again he found nothing suspicious. At last he went to the front door. "*Lola—Lola Lopez!*"

The girl came toward him out of the deepening shadows of dusk. "You—you have find something, *Señor Dan?*"

"No. But there's no telling when the man—or men—who murdered that darky might come back here and attack. You and I are going to lock ourselves in here and wait for Hank to get back. Then one of us will go for the nearest sheriff."

Lola gave him a grateful glance. "I am glad you are here, *Señor Dan*. I feel safer."

THEY closed and barred the doors, the windows. The Mexican girl lighted a couple of kerosene lamps. She seemed nervous; Dan noticed that her fingers trembled as she set fire to the lamp-wicks.

"You—you would like supper, no?" she looked at him.

Landon shook his head. "Not very 'hungry, after finding that corpse. How about you?"

"Me, I am not hongry, either. I—I am frightened," she confessed.

"Then get some rest. Sleep will do you good. I'll stay up and stand watch."

"Thank you, *Señor Dan*. I—I thenk I will take thees advice of yours. I am

ver' tired. . . ." She smiled wanly at him; went into one of the cabin's two small bedrooms. She closed the door behind her.

Dan Landon lighted a cigarette. It struck him that with the lamps lighted, the cabin's interior was a perfect target

Something heavy bludgeoned down on Dan's skull.



for any marksman who might fire through the unshaded windows. He puffed out the lights; noticed, in the ensuing darkness, that no illumination glowed from Lola's bedroom.

"Smart girl!" he muttered. And he settled into a chair in grim silence, with the Luger clenched in his right fist.

Hours passed. Then, in the blackness, Landon heard a stealthy sound. He stiffened; raised the Luger threateningly.

His straining eyes perceived a white blur coming toward him across the room. "Who's there?" he rasped.

"Eet ees I—Lola," the whispered answer came. "I cannot sleep, *Señor Dan*. I am scare' of the darkness. . . ."

He could feel her presence; smell the

faint fragrance of her body. Her hand touched him; brushed his cheek. . . .

"You poor kid!" he whispered. Almost automatically his arm stole out, encompassed her lithe waist. And then she was pressed close to him, tremblingly, thrillingly, with a breath-taking intimacy that made Landon's heart race.

"Dan—hold me tight!" she panted. "I am not scare' when you hold me!"

In the darkness, his hands made the startling discovery that Lola was clad in nothing but the sheerest of silken night dresses. Through the gossamer material he could sense the sweet warmth of her body, the exciting contours of her hips and her breasts. And with Latin fire, she was melting against him, fusing herself against him.

Somehow, his lips met her open mouth in the darkness of the cabin; and he tasted the sultry fire of her kiss. "Lola!" he whispered.

"Dan!" her answer was a panted caress.

His arms tingled electrically about her soft, warm waist. Sweetly-firm, satiny-resilient was her flesh; and his fingers reveled in its warm, billowing lushness. He drew her ever closer as he kissed the hollow of her throat. . . .

She was quivering, panting under his caresses.

"Dan!" she gasped longingly. "You weel come into Lola's room, no? Lola is afraid and lonely. . . ."

She was pulling at him, gently; drawing him toward her in the blackness. His blood was bursting in his veins; his soul was consumed with a raging flame.

Then, he hesitated.

"Lola!" he whispered.

"Si, my lovaire?"

"Are you . . . anything to Hank Merriman?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Hank is my friend. If you are his sweetheart, I can't. . . ."

Her lips raised to his own. "I am only *Señor Merriman's* laboratory asseestant. There is notheeng between us except that. You weel not be betraying your friend by making love with Lola. . . ." And again she pulled him toward her.

HE followed her; and in the pitch-dark blackness his senses were assaulted by the fragrance of her all-pervading perfume and the aliveness of her body pressing close to him. He reached forth; and his hands encountered again her almost naked, quivering form—

And then an electric torch smashed blading white life, blinding Landon. He caught a fleeting glimpse of Lola, intoxicatingly beautiful. Her eyes were wide with fear. . . . Something heavy bludgeoned down on Dan's skull. The sickening, bruising concussion bashed at his consciousness, sent him staggering. He heard Lola's cry of terror. He tried to steady himself, to whirl and grapple with the attacker who had struck him from behind.

Even as he tried to turn, a second cudgeling smash thundered down upon his head. And then Dan slumped to the floor in stupefied unconsciousness.

TWO little yellow men were unstrapping Dan from a pack-burro's shaggy back, in the darkness of the night. He opened his pain-bleared eyes; beheld the Asiatic faces of the men who were untying him.

"You rats!" he rasped weakly. He tried to struggle, to free himself. He felt his arms being yanked behind him as he slid from the pack-burro's back. Vicious, savage pressure was being applied to his wrists. The jiu-jitsu hold sent lancing stabs of agony through his

sinews. He staggered, sank to his knees.

"You will gain nothing by struggling, my friend," a voice spoke silkily, suavely. "We are quite capable of dealing you considerably more pain than you are now experiencing. Will you come quietly?"

Dan Landon was too drunk with pain to answer. But his muscles relaxed, and he ceased to fight against his captors. Foggily, he tried to piece together what had happened.

His captors were yellow men; Asiatics. How had they managed to enter Merriman's cabin? And what had happened to the Mexican girl?

As if in a nightmare-fog of unreality, Dan knew that he was being taken into a rustic house. His feet dragged leadenly under him as he was half-prodded, half-carried down a long corridor. A door was opened before him. He was cast into a lightless room; he sank to hands and knees, like a punch-drunk pugilist. His head, his body, his entire being was an entity of pain.

And then, out of the blackness of his prison-chamber, he heard a faint stirring; a quivering, indrawn breath. Weakly a voice came to him—

"Who is it?"

For a single moment Dan Landon forgot the torturing agony of his hurts, his bruises. He had recognized that weak, quavering voice!

"Hank Merriman!" Landon gasped out.

"Dan!" the voice whispered.

LANDON groped his way forward through the darkness until he came to a trussed, helpless figure.

"What in hell's happened, man?" he panted. "Why are you here? What's it all about?"

Hank Merriman's answer was a broken whisper. "I started for town this

morning, to get supplies. A bunch of yellow devils ambushed me on the trail. They brought me to this house across the lake from my place. Since then they've tortured hell out of me . . . almost constantly. . . ."

"But why? Why, in God's name?"

"They're trying to make me give up the formula of my new gas!" Merriman answered bitterly.

"And you've refused?"

"I've held out thus far. God knows if I can stand much more of it. . . ."

Savagely, Dan shook his head to clear his jumbled thoughts. "Where is the formula?"

"I was too wise to keep it on paper. I committed it to memory. It exists only in my mind. That's why they haven't dared kill me. Instead, they keep torturing me to make me tell. . . ." Then, in the blackness of the room, Hank's voice grew sharper, more agonized. "But what are you doing here?"

"I went to your cabin in answer to your letter," Landon said. "I discovered your negro servant murdered. I—"

"God!" Hank Merriman's panted exclamation was a wheezing pennon of despair. "And what of Lola, my wife?"

"*Your wife?*" Landon whispered; and hot, surging surprise flooded his numbed mind.

"Yes. I forgot that you didn't know I'd married my laboratory assistant, a Mexican girl named Lola Lopez. She's beautiful, Dan. And if those yellow rats have harmed her, I—"

Dan clenched his fists. Good God! Lola Lopez was Hank's wife! And he had almost. . . .

Not that it had been completely his fault. The girl had lied to him; had said that she was nothing to Merriman. . . . Nevertheless, Dan Landon could not bring himself to confess to his friend that

he had made love to Lola, kissed her, caressed her."

"What's wrong, Dan?" Merriman's whisper was sharp with suspense. "Why don't you say something? Is—is there something you know and won't tell me? Has Lola been hurt?"

Grimly, Landon uttered a half-truth. "I don't know whether or not she's been harmed, Hank," he said slowly. "She and I were locked in your cabin, waiting for you to return. I was attacked, hit over the head. And Lola—"

"Yes! What of Lola? Speak, damn you!" Hank Merriman's voice rose hysterically.

"I don't know about her. I don't know if they captured her also, or if they let her get away."

"God in heaven!" Hank Merriman choked. "If they—"

His whispered words were suddenly broken off. From somewhere in the far reaches of the house, there came a wailing, feminine cry. A cry of terror, of dread, of agonized torture!

EVEN as that terrified cry knifed the darkness, Dan Landon heard another sound. It was the grating of a key in a lock. And then the door of the prison-room was thrown open.

Three slant-eyed yellow men entered. One bore a lantern, which he hung to a peg in the wall. Then, swiftly, they leaped at Landon, trussed his hands behind him.

Finished with him, they turned to Merriman. In the lantern-light, Dan caught his first glimpse of his captive chemist-friend. The sight brought sudden nausea to Landon's churning guts.

Merriman's face was a mass of blood-stained bruises. His cheeks were lacerated, his lips puffed and split like gory sponges. And his hands—

Each fingernail had been ripped out by the roots, savagely, horribly. Merriman's left foot was bare, shoeless. But it did not resemble a human foot. It was crushed, pulped beyond human shape, Dan stared. Once, beyond Songkhala in the Malay peninsula, he had seen another foot like that; and he knew what had caused it. The so-called Malay boot, a vicious, sadistic contrivance of wood and turn-screws that inflicted unendurable agony. . . .

Now Dan Landon realized the torture which Hank Merriman must have undergone in protecting his secret. . . .

The leading Asiatic was leaning over Merriman; was speaking softly, silkily:

"Friend Merriman, we have come to you once more to ask that you reveal the formula to us. As you see, we hold the winning cards in this game. You are a prisoner. We have likewise captured Mr. Landon, your friend, here. Moreover, your lovely wife is likewise our . . . shall we say 'guest'?"

Merriman writhed on the floor. His wrists were fettered, helpless. "Damn you!" he panted.

"If you will not reveal the formula, then we shall take certain very regrettable steps, Mr. Merriman. You will be wise to carry your stubbornness no further."

"No! No!" Merriman grated.

"Very good. Gag him, men!" the Asiatic commanded his slant-eyed followers.

In a trice, a gag had been slipped into Hank's mouth. And then Dan Landon felt himself being similarly treated. A rag was forced between his teeth, choking him. A strap was passed around his head, holding the rag in place.

"Come! Bring them!" the leader barked.

Dan was lifted; forced to walk from the room. Behind him he heard Mer-



"Get your hands up into the air, senor, or I shall keel you!"

riman's limping, halting shuffle; and he knew the agony which every step must have cost the chemist.

They went down a corridor; and at last they came to two adjoining doors.

One gave access to a lighted room. Dan caught a brief glimpse of it, and saw that it was a white-walled, well-equipped chemical laboratory. The second door led into a darkened chamber.

"Put Mr. Landon in the dark room," the Asiatic leader said evenly. "We shall not need him for the present."

Landon was thrust into the black-dark room which adjoined the lighted laboratory. The door closed on him. Then he beheld a thin pencil of light, and realized that there must be a door between this chamber and the laboratory. He fumbled toward it; found it. Kneeling, he glued his eye to a keyhole which permitted him a restricted view of the white-walled chamber adjoining.

HE saw Hank Merriman being hauled into that lighted white laboratory and trussed to a chair.

There came a feminine wail of fear. Then two more little yellow men entered the laboratory, bearing between them the struggling figure of the Mexican girl, Lola, Merriman's wife.

Save for torn step-ins, and shreds of a brassiere she was naked. She cast one wide-eyed, terrified glance at her husband; and there was appeal in her dark eyes.

The leader of the gang now approached Merriman. "My friend," he smiled mirthlessly, "we are about to let you witness a little scene between some of my men and your very desirable wife. Perhaps, when we have finished, you will be willing to reveal the secret of your formula!"

In the next room, peering through the keyhole and impotent to interfere, Landon watched what followed. It was revolting, brutal, horrible.

The dark-eyed Lola was thrown upon a couch. There were now five of the yellow men grouped about her, including the leader. He spoke suavely. "I shall have the honor first," he announced.

The others fell back. Then the slant-eyed leader's hands clawed forth; pawed

at Lola's writhing shoulders, ran down her arms, caressing daintily her silken skin. . . .

She cried out as the yellow man became more savage, but she was powerless to resist his growing frenzy. . . .

AT last, the Asiatic released her; smiled at his four henchmen. "Well?" he said politely.

Lola tried to scream; but hard yellow hands muffled her mouth. And then a saturnalia or bestiality followed; a saturnalia unspeakable, revolting. . . .

. . . And all the while, Hank Merriman was twisting and writhing at the bonds which held him to his chair; while in the next room, Landon struggled desperately at the fetters which pinioned his wrists behind him.

But Landon's gyves held true. At last, sweating and impotent, Dan Landon applied his eye once more to the keyhole and stared into the white-walled laboratory.

He saw the Asiatic approaching Hank Merriman; saw the chemist's gag being removed. "Now, friend Merriman," the slant-eyed yellow man smiled, "will you give us the formula? Or do you prefer to see your wife treated to even harsher indignities?"

Hank Merriman's answer was a croaking, defeated sob. "I—I'll tell!" he mumbled. "I would have told before you laid hands on Lola, if you'd removed this foul gag!"

The Asiatic grinned. "I wanted you to see that I meant business, my friend. We Orientals do not bluff, as you Yankees do! And now—the formula!"

Merriman began gasping out certain chemical combinations. And as he spoke, the Asiatic leader went to a work-bench; began compounding the elements as Merriman dictated them.

The process was long, involved, tedious. But at last, after an hour that seemed ages long, the task was finished; and the yellow man stood before a thin glass carboy filled with thick, greenish fog that eddied and drifted within its transparent container.

The slant-eyed leader chuckled evilly. "Now we shall test the gas!" he spoke softly. He uttered a command to two of his yellow henchmen.

They turned, left the laboratory. Then they came back, trundling before them what appeared to be a small cage of thick plate glass.

In the next room, Dan Landon stiffened in horror. Good God—they were forcing Hank Merriman into that glass cage! They were sealing him into it! And now, through a valve, they were introducing a small quantity of that eddying, green gas into the glass chamber. . . !

They were using Hank Merriman as a human guinea-pig! They were testing the death-dealing qualities of the gas upon the man who had invented it!

Dan Landon saw the curling green tentacles of gas flowing into the death-cage. He saw Hank Merriman stiffen, struggle—and then go limp. Sickening, drooling trickles of dark blood abruptly gushed from the chemist's nostrils and mouth. Then Merriman slumped to the floor of the glass chamber of death. . . .

And as Merriman died, the Mexican girl, Lola Lopez, suddenly burst out in peals of amused laughter!

HER yellow captors had released her. She now stood up from the couch, grinning. "A splendid show!" she applauded. "We now have the formula, and that peeg of a Hank Merriman ees dead! Our plan worked to perfection,

si? Just as I knew eet would! Poor fool—he thought that hees lovely wife was being mistreated by you yellow men! He deed not guess that I was; how you say? in league with you from the beegening to steal his formula!"

In the next room, Landon gasped. The whole drama had been deliberately staged to trick Merriman into revealing his formula. . . !

Red rage descended before his eyes. He knew that he would be next to die. The yellow men would not permit him to live, knowing as much as he did. And there was no chance of his escaping. . . .

A sudden plan leaped into his brain. A plan that would avenge Hank Merriman. . . .

Landon backed off from the door which led into the laboratory; gathered his hard muscles. Bruised, battered, gagged, with his wrists fettered behind him, his feet were still free. And in that fact lay the core of Dan's plan. . . .

He crouched; drew a deep, sobbing breath. And then he hurled himself at the door.

His shoulder bashed into the portal, splintered it. The door sagged open. Landon catapulted into the white-walled, brightly-lighted room.

He heard sudden harsh shouts; heard Lola screaming in fear. He saw the Asiatic leader go for his automatic, drag it out. The weapon roared, belched a stream of red flame. Dan felt the shattering impact of scalding lead burning through his chest, his guts. . . .

Yet he kept on, indomitably, relentlessly. The other four Asiatics were shooting at him now. Bullets were thudding into him, smashing at him. But he kept on. He *had* to keep on! Ten more steps—eight—six—three—

(Continued on page 109)

VALLEY of BLOOD

They forbade Jim to fly his plane into the mad-woman's country. But all their warnings meant nothing when he received the message written in the white girl's blood!

MYNEER VAN STENT, the governor of that province of Celebes, had told Jim Darrell that no plane could across the Salibaya Range, and certainly not the one in which he had arrived. It was not so much a matter of height as of a certain rarefaction of the atmosphere, due, to the alternations of blazing heat by day and freezing cold by night.

"It has been tried twice," van Stent explained, and told of crashes on the mountain tops. At least, neither of the planes nor their occupants had been seen again.

"But we got the pilots' heads," he went on grimly. "Neatly prepared in the approved Celebes fashion. We found them lying in the compound early one morning. Maybe The Hague will send



By **LEW MERRILL**

Her figure tottered to their feet and collapsed. "Save her! Forgive!" she murmured.



us out an up-to-date plane, with a couple of machine-guns. Then we'll wipe out that nest of freebooters."

And he went on to tell of a secret egress from the mountain valley, by which, periodically, the Dyaks raided their neighbors, killing men, women, and children, apparently for the sheer love of slaughter.

"But this legend of a white woman who rules them, the only woman among them—do you believe that?" asked Jim.

"That's true enough," said Mynheer the governor, with a glance at the old Dr. Beyers, who was seated with them on the verandah of the Government House.

"And that she was—?"

"An Englishwoman, Lady—well, we

won't mention names," said van Stent. "Fifteen or sixteen years ago her husband, a retiring British official, was taking her and their little daughter home after his service in Borneo expired. Their vessel was shipwrecked off this coast. The husband and child were massacred, the woman made a prisoner. That was the last that was heard of her, until she reappeared as the leader of this tribe."

"Persuaded the tribe to put all their women to death, and invented a new religion?" asked Jim, quoting a story he had heard at Macassar? "And—and—God, how many of these tribesmen are there?"

"Perhaps two hundred, perhaps three," said the governor.

"And she—one woman—?"

"Mine friend," grunted old Dr. Beyers, "I have seen her."

JIM saw a look of protest on the governor's face, but Beyers went on:

"It will do no harm to tell now. Fifteen years ago she came to me—well, captured me, with an escort of savages with spears, when I was traveling in the interior. A madwoman! I should have thought her a Dyak, save for her bright golden hair. The sun had bleached it to spun gold. Ach, Gott, she was beautiful then! She forced me to do something to her. A slight operation. I begged her to come back with me. But she forced me to do what she wanted, under pain of death.

"I understood then. The murder of her husband and child had driven her mad, and that madness had taken a certain form. She had had all the native women killed, so that she could be the only woman in the tribe. She had all the adult males killed too, murdered

asleep by the boys, and her escorts were youths of about sixteen. But that was fifteen years ago.

"Thus, for a madwoman, it was not so difficult to create that new religion, with herself as a mother-goddess, a wife-goddess, the only woman. You understand, Mr. Darrell?"

"But three hundred men!" protested Darrell.

"Not so difficult for her," grunted Beyers. "Not with that phase of madness. A system of rewards and punishments, and the psychology of anticipation, *ja?* They are mad too. I have told Mynheer, the governor, that, when our plane arrives, they must be wiped out like wild beasts. It is immoral—amoral, horrible!"

"But as for your plane," said the governor, "it could not cross the mountains, and you are forbidden to attempt it. There is no oil in that region, and your commission to locate oilfields for your American company might take you to many parts where the natives are orderly."

WHICH sounded reasonable to Jim, as he made his way back to the field where he had landed after his flight to Borneo. The plane, beside his tent, was guarded by six native policemen. All that afternoon it had been surrounded by a chattering crowd, but these had melted away at nightfall.

Jim entered his tent. Reasonable—yes. But he hadn't spoken of the message, scrawled on a dry leaf in what looked like blood, evidently from the madwoman:

"I am an English woman. Come and save me. Bearer will show you the secret way into the mountains."

There was a diagram of the mountain

range, and a crude representation of the way.

The bearer, a primitive savage, had secretly handed the leaf to Jim, apparently under the impression that he was the chief man in the settlement. He was crouching inside the tent now, like a dog, guarding Jim's baggage.

When Jim beckoned him out, he came, gibbering something in his own language. Jim pointed toward the plane. He planned to get as near as possible to the mountains, thirty miles away, before descending. If he couldn't top them, then he'd go by the secret trail.

THE nights were almost as hot as the days on the sea coast, and the motor started almost instantly. Jim indicated to the boy to get upon one wing. He started back for the tent to get his baggage.

That was when he fell foul of the native soldiers. They were not just to guard him and his plane against curiosity-mongers. They were to keep him from taking off. Mynheer must have shrewdly read his intentions, and issued special orders. They swarmed about the plane, evidently determined not to let him enter. Two of them tried to pull the native off the wing, but quick thrusts of a previously hidden dirk made them draw back.

Jim saw it all in a flash. His baggage would have to be left behind. Likewise his linen coat, for it was being pulled from his back. He sent one man reeling with a right to the jaw, drew his revolver, held the rest at bay, leaped into the cockpit. No time to adjust his safety-belt. Stick forward, tail up, bump, bump, and skip over the uneven ground. For a moment it looked as if one of the fools would connect with the propeller.

And then the old crate had taken the

air, and Jim pulled back the stick and gave her the gun, sending her shooting upward at almost a stalling angle.

Then he had levelled off, and was circling above the settlement, and Government House, starkly silhouetted in the moonlight. And now he was heading toward the mountains, working the stick nicely to counterbalance the weight of the native who clung, petrified with terror, to his strut.

After that, Jim winged his way northward, until the mighty range began to cap his horizon. Then upward, slowly upward, feeling his way through an atmosphere peculiarly bumpy. Once he turned toward the boy and swept his hand out in a gesture. The boy understood, and indicated a mighty cliff behind which Jim had already gathered the hidden valley lay.

Upward and upward, clearing minor peaks, up into the frigid air. The great cliff was not far away now, but Jim would need an elevation of seven thousand to clear it. Not much—in most places. But already the motor was protesting. Then it conked, with an expiring cough. It was through. The Dutchman had been right, hadn't been stalling, as Jim had supposed. The only hope now was to find a landing-place in that tangle of ravine and scrub.

The nose was pointing down, the tail beginning to spin. Jim went into neutral and right-ruddered, came out of the dive two thousand feet above the scrub. No landing-place. He was almost at the base of the great cliff, itself set three or four thousand feet above the flats beyond the base of the mountains. Slowly down, circling, till the giant rattans almost brushed the fuselage.

Crash into the rattans, splintering fuselage and folding wings!

Jim stepped out of the wreckage,

snapped his thumb joint back where it belonged, and yanked the chattering native to his feet. The native hadn't a single scratch upon him.

DAWN was breaking as the two emerged from the pass and saw the long, green valley stretching away before them, entirely girdled with mountains, unapproachable, save by that track up which the two men had labored all night.

Dawn, and a sudden rush of spear-men out of the mists, and a woman at their head. A woman as brown as they, but with a crown of brightest hair that hung down to her waist. A woman of perhaps forty years, nude, like her spear-men, save for a loin-clout. Two breasts superbly moulded, body a little fleshy, but lithe as a cat's, wide hips that strained against their covering, brown legs and bare brown feet that scrambled over the stones and thorns as if they were shod.

No time for friendly gestures. As the first spears began to fly, Jim let loose with his revolver. At the crack, at the sight of their leaders falling, the natives drew back. And simultaneously the mists rose, revealing a body of perhaps two hundred, crowding forward in a thick mass.

Screeching like the madwoman she was supposed to be, the woman leaped forward, and drove the spear she carried through the native's throat. He toppled and dropped, his death-cry drowned in the gurgle of blood. Then the woman had withdrawn the spear and turned upon Jim.

There was—there ought to be another cartridge in Jim's revolver, but Jim couldn't shoot her. Was it in a moment of madness that the woman failed to recognize him as the man she had sent for?

As Jim hesitated, the woman leaped. Two strong arms encircled him and pressed his to his sides. She grappled with him madly, her breasts flattening against his chest, one knee hooked behind Jim's, trying to throw him, and her hair a cascade of gold over them both. The grip of that woman-body took his strength, filled him with mingled loathing and weakness.

Then he was down, and the revolver torn from his hand. Helpless in the grasp of half-a-dozen natives, Jim was frog-marched, despite his struggles, toward an ancient stone building that looked like one of the prehistoric fortresses scattered all over the East Indies.

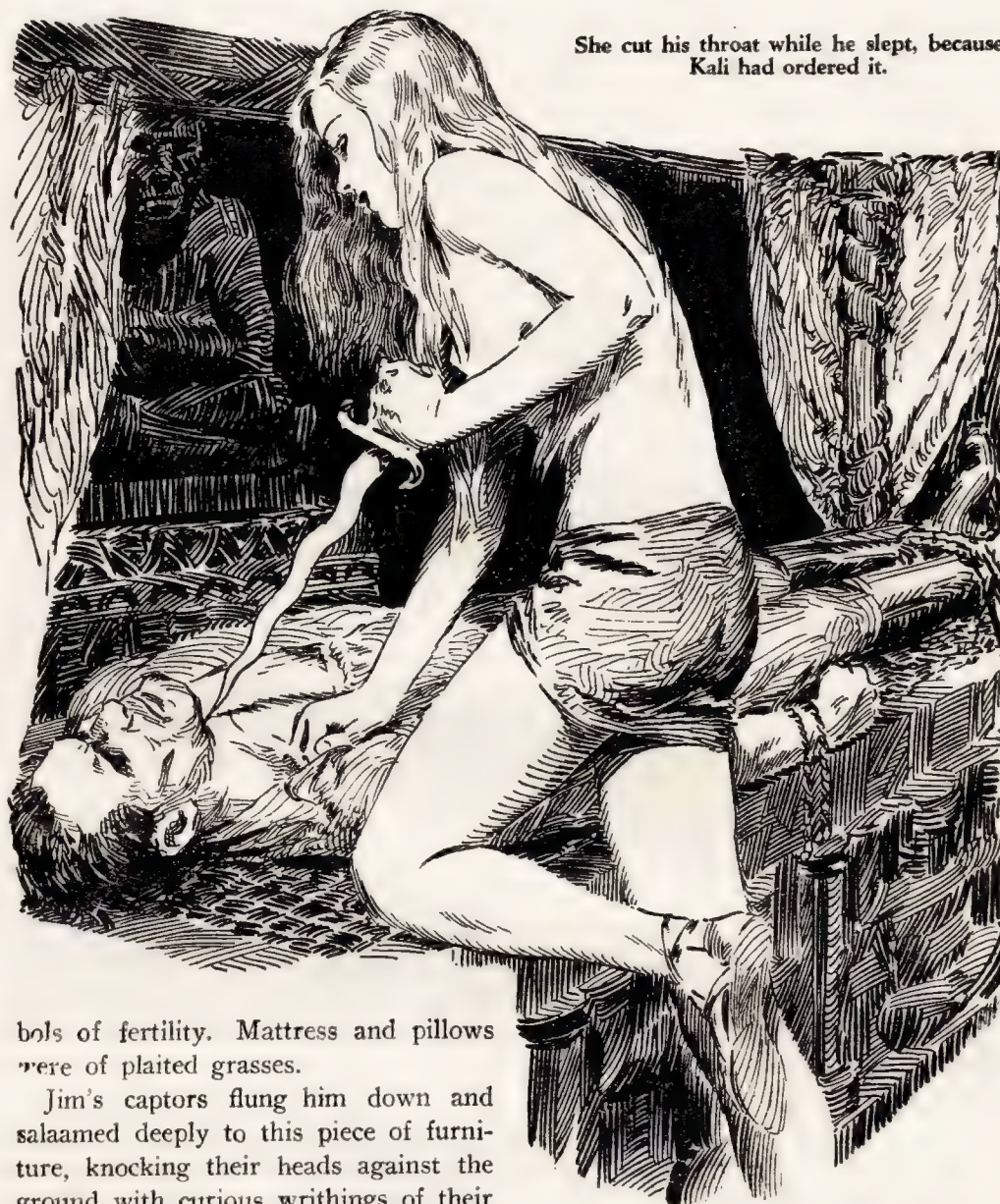
Two natives came running up with lengths of plaited rattan cord, pliant as silk, strong as steel. In a few moments Jim was securely trussed, and helpless.

IF the place had been a fort, it was a temple too, for the stone entrance was carved with vile figures of the Hindu gods. A reed curtain hung before it. But it was not through the entrance that Jim was carried. Through a small doorway to one side of it, and along a stone corridor, lit faintly by oil or butter lamps. Then a turn, the lifting of another curtain, and Jim guessed that he was in the temple.

It was a great rectangle, all of stone, divided half-way across by a wide curtain, so that the front part was invisible. But the portion into which Jim was carried contained no altar, nothing except an enormous bed.

A lamp on either side of it faintly illuminated this chamber, showing that the bed had once been the state bed of some dead and forgotten Rajah, for the four posts were carved with the Hindu sym-

She cut his throat while he slept, because Kali had ordered it.



bols of fertility. Mattress and pillows were of plaited grasses.

Jim's captors flung him down and salaamed deeply to this piece of furniture, knocking their heads against the ground with curious writhings of their bodies. Then, at the woman's crisp command, they were gone, and she seated herself upon the bed beside Jim and looked at him fixedly.

"I am Marian Curtis," she said, as one who is trying to remember a half-forgotten language. "How did you come into my kingdom?"

Some instinct kept Jim from referring to the *chit* that the native boy had

brought him. If Marian had forgotten writing it, it might be as well not to remind her yet.

"Ah, I know!" she cried in sudden frenzy. "That boy escaped and betrayed me. So you think to spy on me, do you? I have a law that is never broken. All strangers who come here die. You are only the third.

"The first who found the way—the

young Englishman, Crandall. Ah, that was long ago, before they took the brains out of the goddess Kali, and put them into mine. He wanted me to go away with him, and I almost yielded. His skin was white as a girl's, and yet he was a man. So I cut his throat while he slept, because the goddess Kali ordered me to do it.

"And the second was the Dutch hunter, Smidt. Forty years old, and strong as a bull, and hairy as an ape. He cried like a baby and begged me for mercy, and he almost broke his bonds before I plunged my knife into his heart.

"So you must die, too, but you shall love me before I die, as Smidt and the Englishman did. See, look at me! Do I not offer you a glorious gift before I sacrifice you to the Mother-goddess?"

She drew herself to her full height, posing there, conscious of what her beauty was doing to him, for a moment. Then she had flung herself upon him, and her hot mouth was glued on Jim's, and he could feel her breath, moist and sweet.

"Love me," she panted. "I am tired of these brown Malays. You are the first white man in years and years. Love me, if you are a man!"

And she clasped him furiously to her, but now sheer pity for her left Jim cold as ice. It was clear that the moment of lucidity in which she had written that note had been forgotten.

"Love me!" she whispered into Jim's ear. "This is the sacred bed of Kali, the Mother-goddess!"

Jim's pity changed to horror. Here, then—here was the center of the abominable religion that this madwoman had invented!

SUDDENLY her mood changed. She sprang to her feet, her heavy breasts

swaying, and struck him in the face with her clenched fist.

"You refuse me!" she screamed. "Is it because you are afraid of the death that shall come afterward. I would only have cut your throat, but now I swear you shall be tortured horribly, flayed alive, and torn into a thousand pieces!"

She struck him again and again, with all a man's force behind her blows, until Jim's lips and nose were bleeding. She drew a short, wavy kriss from her loincloth, and held it at his throat.

Then horrible laughter broke from her lips. "You shall love me when you drink the love-draught tonight," she shrieked. "You shall forget the death that waits for you, and think it a little thing when the divine madness of the goddess comes upon you! Lie there and dream of me. Look at me! Am I not beautiful? But when you drink the potion, you shall look upon me as if I were Mother Kali herself."

Softly, sinuously she glided from the chamber, leaving Jim lying there, feeling the blood running down his face.

Desperately he tried to free himself from his bonds, but the flexible rattan merely bit more deeply into his flesh, and he could not loosen them at all. Trussed, helpless, arms bound to his sides, legs tied at thighs, knees, and ankles, he tried to roll off the bed, and discovered that his feet and shoulders were fastened to the unyielding framework.

The heat within the temple was fearful. The sweat was pouring down Jim's face and body, seeping into the rags that his shirt and trousers had become after his struggle.

Hours seemed to pass. No one entered, and not a sound was to be heard.

Jim would have sold his soul for a drink of water.

It must have been in the full heat of the day when a click in the wall opposite the curtain focused Jim's eyes upon the spot.

Two great blocks in the temple wall were slowly revolving. Now there was a gap, and in that gap there stood a woman's figure.

For an instant Jim thought it was the madwoman come back. But then, faint though the light was, he saw that this was a younger, smaller, slighter figure, a girl, hardly a woman, even.

As she came stealthily forward, Jim saw that she was white. She wore a single garment of some native fibre, reaching to the knees. Soft girlish breasts pressed against it from beneath, revealing their rounded contours; under the skirt the white of feminine thighs and slender legs gleamed in the lamp-light. In her hand was a jar of water.

JIM drank greedily, drained it, let her set it down, looked at her in wonder, and suddenly understood.

"You sent me that message?" he whispered.

"I sent Hassan to find some strong white *Tuan* who would save me," answered the girl, and again the words, though perfectly pronounced, seemed unaccustomed. "He brought you here, and they killed him. You should have brought an army."

"I was a fool," Jim muttered.

"Because they killed him, I shall never forgive her, though she is my mother."

"Your mother?" whispered Jim in amazement, recalling Mynheer's story.

"I am Mary Alice Curtis, and my father was a big white *Tuan*. He was ship-wrecked and killed, and my mother and I were captured and brought here. Then she went mad, and became the ruler of these people. We are the only

two women here. These Dyaks do not know for sure that there are other women in the world, for they are maddened with the draft when they go out to kill, and then they kill every living thing.

"My mother is the only woman they know, and so they worship her, because each of them thinks himself her husband."

"God!" muttered Jim.

"Each night they drink the love-draught, which is made from a tree, and then she rewards her favored ones. But she was not always mad. When she was sane, she managed to hide me in a secret treasure-room, and gave out that I was dead, and only Hassan discovered me. He told me about the secret way, and he would have helped me escape, but I told him to seek out a white *Tuan* like my father. I thought he would bring an army with him, for my father had more soldiers than he could count."

"You have been hidden since you were a child?"

"Only my mother knows. Sometimes, when she ceased to be mad, she would cry, and plan to escape with me. But of late years she has understood nothing, save that I must still be hidden, for fear that the Dyaks will turn from her to me. And of late I think she has planned to kill me."

Jim set his teeth hard. "Not if I can help you. Can you cut these ropes?" he said.

The girl bent over him. "It is simple," she answered. "No kriss could cut them, but they can be untied. See, now, but do not move."

Her fingers moved deftly in the rattan web for a few moments, and suddenly it loosened, fell apart upon the bed. Jim sat up, rubbing his bruised limbs.

"When will she come back?" he asked.

"Not until nightfall. All day she

sleeps. But tonight she will choose you for her first husband, and afterward the Dyaks will tear you limb from limb."

Jim took the girl's slender hand in his. "Mary Alice, if we can escape, will you come with me?" he asked. But there was no need of any answer.

AS he drew her toward him, the garment gaped at the top, and the two small breasts were momentarily free. Suddenly an immense reaction of emotion, a recklessness of the future, came upon Jim. If they won free, she would be his forever; if not, she would have short shrift from the madwoman. The sweet perfume of her maddened him as he drew her, unresisting, into his arms.

Soft panting sighs came from her lips, and her whole body quivered; suddenly she flung her arms about his neck and clung to him tautly.

"I am yours, *Tuan*. I was afraid of love, but now I know that it is beautiful," she whispered, pressing her mouth to his.

And later, when the storm had passed, Jim knew, somehow, that he could not fail. The gods hadn't sent him this girl that he might lose her again. Even the dread Kali couldn't be so cruel as that.

HOURS must have passed again before Mary Alice detached herself gently. From her garment she withdrew a wavy-edged kriss which she handed Jim. For a moment she stood before him in the light of the butter-lamps, elusive, fragrant, feminine, then she drew the *sarong* more closely about her.

"We must wait till it grows dark," she said, "or they would catch us before we reached the secret pass. Hide this." She slipped the kriss beneath him, and rearranged the rattan ropes, so that they looked as if they had not been tampered

with. "Lie still, and do not let her see that you are free," she said.

"And then?"

"Tonight the Dyaks will be maddened with the love-draught, and she will select those whom she intends to honor, and, after she has done with you, they will tear you to pieces. Such is her plan, for Hassan has told me what they did to the two other white men who came here."

"Then she lied to me about them," thought Jim.

"When she has chosen her husbands, and the rest are mad with the draught, you must choose your time, cut your way through to that wall, and I shall be waiting there. I shall open it for you. If we can close it in their faces, they cannot open it from the temple side, and there will be a chance, just one little chance. But do not taste the love-draught."

"You're a wonderful girl," said Jim. "Bend down and kiss me."

Again his senses reeled as he felt her warm, fragrant form in his arms, and the moist pressure of her lips on his. Then she had rearranged the rattan, picked up the water-jar, and glided like a wraith from the temple.

THE noise was beginning now, the droning of many voices in a monotonous, hoarse chant, somewhere outside, and gradually growing louder and coming nearer.

The sounds grew wilder. The thud of naked feet upon the earth was audible, like a buffalo stampede. Wilder and wilder grew the shouting, and then suddenly the part of the temple behind the curtain was filled with a shrieking crowd.

Above the sounds Jim could hear that of the woman, Marian's voice.

Then suddenly the curtain was pulled

away on either side, sliding on a taut rope of rattan. And Jim saw the front part of the temple.

All around the sides were the grotesque figures of Hindoo gods. The

tallest of them stood immediately before the bed. Jim could see only the back of a female figure, before which was a long, flat altar. And on the altar stood Marian, almost nude.



The native toppled and dropped, his death-cry drowned in a gurgle of blood.

Before her all the Dyaks were assembled, cramming every inch of the stone temple, all gazing up at her with rapt attention and rolling eyes, while wild peals broke from their throats.

Slowly the woman raised an earthen goblet to her lips and drank from it. Then each man of the crowd came forward, stooping to knock head against the floor, and drank from two huge fiber pails containing the potion.

Marian spoke, and the hall grew still as death. The eyeballs were the only things that moved, flashes of whiteness in the brown faces.

She was speaking names, and, one by one, ten of the natives detached themselves from the crowd and came forward to the altar. And a thrill of shame and horror ran through Jim as he realized what this meant.

She waved her hand, and suddenly wild yells rang forth, and the rest of the crowd ran leaping out of the temple. She spoke to the ten men, who prostrated themselves again and knocked their heads upon the floor.

They rose and stood in line before her, their rolling eyes following each movement of her sinuous body. The twitching muscles showed that the drug had already taken effect. Its sensuous effects were shown in the slaving lips, the quiver of the lithe brown forms.

Marian turned and walked to where Jim lay, apparently helpless in his bonds. The earthen goblet was in her hands. She placed it to his lips.

"Drink," she said softly, crooningly. "Drink, my beloved." Her eyes were hot upon his face.

With one bound Jim had leaped from the bed, shaking off the rattan ropes. He dashed the goblet from the woman's hands. He dealt her a buffet that sent

her sprawling among the slaving brown men.

Then, kriss in hand, he ran toward the wall.

Marian shrieked, and instantly the ten were galvanized into demoniac fury. They leaped toward Jim.

But the wall was opening—opening. . . .

Jim turned, the kriss flashed in the lamplight, and, with a scream, the foremost of the Dyaks dropped, stabbed through the belly. Jim wrenched the kriss free. The wall was open now. He leaped through, and saw Mary Alice standing on the other side.

HOWLING like devils, the nine, with Marian in their midst, sprang for the aperture. One leaped through, and again the kriss rose and fell, and another Dyak lay at Jim's feet, his life-blood gushing from a frightful wound in the throat. Another sprang, and got wedged in the revolving stones. For an instant the mechanism ceased; then it went on, and the mangled, screeching thing that had been a man dropped in a dark mass on the other side as the aperture closed, shutting off completely the sound of the shrieking, raving madwoman and her companions.

Mary Alice was standing against the wall of a stone corridor, a little butter-lamp in her hand. The shapeless thing at Jim's feet neither cried nor stirred.

"Quick, *Tuan*, quick! Our chance is small, but I know the way, for I went with Hassan once to the very edge of the pass, after he gave me the key of my room."

She almost dragged him after her, down a flight of ancient steps, then along a tunnel, littered with great fallen blocks of stone. At last, where stone completely blocked the tunnel, the moonlight ap-

peared through an opening overhead.

Jim scrambled up the rough blocks, found his head above ground, stooped, and hoisted up the girl. A scramble, and they emerged some hundred feet from the extreme edge of the stone fort, with the scrub-covered base of the mountains close at hand.

"This way, *Tuan*, this way!" sobbed the girl.

Jim stopped for an instant, caught her to him, felt her breasts strained against his, and kissed her. And that was the moment of discovery.

WILD, maniacal shrieks indicated that the madwoman had shrewdly guessed their course. In the moonlight Jim could see at least fifty of the Dyaks streaming in pursuit.

He ran as he had never run before, but a white man, hampered with boots, could hardly hope to outrun a native on his own ground; the woman, Marian, ran with the swiftest of the natives, and Mary Alice, with long years of imprisonment behind her, could hardly run at all.

Already spears were whizzing past Jim's head. And the pass by which he had come—he could guess its location—was still far away.

"Run! Run!" Jim shouted to Mary Alice, and then planted himself, kriss in hand, directly in the path of the oncoming savages.

The madwoman's shrieks rose above the din. She was calling to her followers, and Jim guessed what she was telling them. They were to take him alive, reserve him for the torture she had meant for him all the time.

The spears no longer flew. But the natives were coming on. They were about twenty feet away from him, and Jim braced himself for the last fight.

He was no longer conscious of Mary Alice.

Then suddenly the roar of firearms drowned the yells. The front rank of the natives melted away. Firearms? No, a machine-gun, manned by half-a-dozen brown men under command of a white, bearded officer.

Again, again those staccato blasts ripped through the air. The savages had turned to flee, but there was no flight for them. Swiftly, inexorably, as a reaper mows, they were cut down, until the last man dropped among his companions on that bloodstained field.

Only one figure tottered to Jim's feet and collapsed there. It was Marian, and the whole upper portion of her body had almost been blown to pieces.

"Save her! Forgive!" she whispered, and sobbed, and died. But the madness seemed to have been gone from her face.

Jim swung about, to see Mary Alice in the grasp of the white officer. He was leading her toward Jim. Jim recognized the face beneath the white sun-helmet. It was that of Mynheer van Stent.

"UND so you outwitted us, you thought, eh?" grinned the Dutchman a little later, as Jim sprawled upon the ground at the head of the pass. He was feeling better, distinctly better, with a bottle of champagne, ice-cold from the thermos flask into which it had been emptied, inside him. And much better because Mary Alice was seated beside him, and her hand was in his own.

"Id seems to haf been even worse than I expected," continued Heer van Stent. "And if I had let you go to your death, your Government would have raised hell with mine Government, and I should have been recalled. But who

(Continued on page 127)

Again Sangre Brown finds himself entangled in international spying maneuvers . . . and again it is a girl who helps him succeed.

BLOOD HAS

ALL I can hear is the thunder of the slashing waves. All I can see is bathed in the splendid light of the full moon. I look for some move-

ment to betray the presence of Number 29. Not a movement anywhere. Can the note be a trap?

From a point on the road above *Pie de la Cuesta* Pepito and I look searchingly down on the strangest coast line in the world. For eighty kilometers Lake Coyuca and Lake San Jeronimo extend their canal-joined expanses of silver parallel with the ocean. At no



The horse snorted. It was not a bird. It was a seaplane with dead motor!



By JOHN BARD

Sticky Fingers

point are the "sweet" waters of the lakes more than four kilometers from the salt water of the Pacific and, just below me at Todd's Port on the end of Lake Coyuca, the lake and the ocean are separated only by a narrow strip of sandy beach.

Uneasily I view this calm and peaceful scene. Far out on the moon-drenched Pacific I can make out the faint outline of what seems to be a fishing smack. The riding light keeps winking at me as if it were struggling against a high wind. But there is no wind. The port and starboard lights are burning. Red and green. I look at them a moment puzzled. They look peculiar. There is something wrong. Red and green. . . red and green. . . green and red. That's it! They are reversed. *Reversed!*

But it can't be Old Hardhead! He's still in his shell up at Border H. Q. It simply can't be him on that frail little fishing smack. But *reversed!* That's his key word. He always says, "When you find anything reversed look for me."

I FEEL Pepito stiffen under me. His ears prick forward. His head snaps toward the white beach below. His great body trembles with that sixth sense of danger that has so often saved my neck.

I duck down and, lying along his neck, sight between his ears to get the focal point of his gaze. Gradually I make out the black head against the white foam of the breakers. A swimmer is struggling against the swift undertow. The damn' fool! He ought to have known better than to go swimming *there!*

I make a peculiar sighing sound between my teeth and Pepito sprints forward down the road like the devil is after him. In two minutes he is laboring across the soft sand of the beach toward the figure struggling in the crashing surf. At the beginning of the steep shingle I draw him up and leap from the saddle. I am waist deep in the swirling water before I manage to grip my fingers in the dark hair of the head that is being swept out once more by the powerful undertow.

I give the short hair a sharp tug, catch the slight figure in my arms and start running up the shingle. I say running, but the undertow is so strong against my legs that my feet feel like the lead weights of a diver's suit.

It is the impact of the next breaker that bowls the two of us over and rolls us up the hard packed beach like a couple of interlocked tumble-weeds. I manage to struggle to my knees in time

to catch one of the swimmer's feet as the current starts dragging back. In another moment we are safe above the water line and I look down at the figure I'm dragging so informally by the right foot. I can feel my eyes bulge with surprise. It is a woman.

She is stark naked except for a scant dance set. The pink silk panties cling to her curves as if they are painted on. The lace brassiere is askew leaving one lovely, bulb-like, perfect breast almost bare in the light of the moon. The flat white stomach rises and falls seductively with each breath. Hanging from a silver chain between the alluring breasts is an oblong metal tube.

DRIPPING her foot, suddenly I kneel beside her and brush back the short boyish hair. I give a grunt of surprise. It is Petra. At that moment she gives a deep sigh and opens her eyes at me.

"*Pensé que yo puedo nadar,*" she murmurs.

"You're a good swimmer, Petra. But nobody could fight the undertow at this point. You ought not to be swimming out here alone."

Lifting her arms she locked her hands behind my neck and draws herself up. "Thanks for saving my life, Sangre."

"Don't mention it. I needed a bath anyway."

She sticks her lips up close to mine and turns them out a little, exposing their velvet inner surfaces.

"I'm terribly spent, Sangre. If you kissed me, I couldn't resist."

A warm aroma arises from the perfumed valley of her pale breasts. My nostrils tingle.

"Petra, if I kissed you now, I couldn't resist."

With a quick tug she pulls my head

down. Her hot, wet lips fasten over mine. A sort of moon blindness blurs my eyes. I struggle to my feet but she comes up with me without releasing her hold. I feel her round soft breasts against my chest. A sharp, jagged thrill gnaws along my spine. A flame flicks back and forth across my lips. I throw my arms around her and pull her to me. My temples throb.

After a while she says, "You're hurting me."

"It isn't me. It's that gadget you've got around your neck. It's gouging me too."

"Oh. . . ." she pushes me away and quickly unhooks the long metal tube from the silver chain. "Take it quick, Sangre! It's for you. I swam in with it from the boat. Number 29 couldn't meet you. They got him this afternoon after he sent you the note."

I shake my head and say, "Why didn't you tell me right away?"

I grab the waterproof metal tube and, unscrewing one end, slip out a small oblong pasteboard box wrapped in a piece of white paper. I unwrap the paper. On the label of the box it says, "Specific No. 57". On the paper it says in code:

*Yellow Bulldog Lying Off
Watch for Flying Fish Dog
Meat Arrives Pie Twelve
And Half Get Wrapping Paper
Let Mercury Lam*

Reverse

Mentally I translate, "Yellow Bulldogoriental warship lying off coast. . . . watch for *Flying Fish*. . . .hydroplane*Dog Meat*. . . .whatever ship is waiting for. . . .arrives *Pie de la Cuesta* at twelve-thirty. . . . Get the papers. . . . but let the messenger go through."

I hold my wrist watch to my ear to see if my watch has survived its sudden

bath. It hasn't. The hands are stopped at eleven thirty-five.

"You little so and so," I say, grabbing Petra by the arm and rushing her toward Pepito, "if we're too late, Old Hardhead will court martial us both."

As I am hoisting her up behind the saddle a peculiar snort from Pepito makes me hold my breath. I listen. There isn't a sound but the ocean. Pepito is looking up across the lake behind me. Then I see a silver spangled bird swerving above the lake. The breath hisses between my teeth. It isn't a bird. It is a seaplane that has come down from a great height with a dead motor. . . . to avoid noise.

In a moment it has disappeared below the edge of the dense growth of *mangles* along the edge of the lake. I hear its pontoons splash against the smooth waters of Lake Coyuca. That plane will be from the warship. That pilot will be waiting for the messenger.

PRAYING that the pilot hasn't seen us I vault into the saddle, mutter, "Hang on, Half Pint," and head across the sand back up the road toward Acapulco. If I can only make the tunnel before the messenger arrives. When we reach the top of the grade, I send Pepito at a swift trot around the winding *carretera* toward the tunnel. We slow down to a walk as we go through the first cut and gradually increase our pace again until we're going at a full gallop as we pass the wave-lashed rocky inlet that's known as the Devil's Fronton.

Petra speaks suddenly in my ear, "Are you going to use what's in the box?"

"How the hell do I know," I growl. "I don't know what's in the box. It's code-marked, 'Specific No. 57', but I'll have to look it up to see."

I can see the tunnel two turns ahead.

"Old Hardhead said you would know how to use them." She is hugging me so tightly to keep from falling that I can feel the hot round pressure of her luscious breasts against my back. Her breath is warm in my ear. "He said you'd used them once before."

"He's crazy. I've never used anything he sent me but once before. . . . Saa-ay, wait a minute. . . . Did he tell you what's in the box?"

"Yes . . . cataleptic bombs. . . . I was almost afraid to dive off the boat for fear they'd explode and blow me to bits. . . ."

I laugh heartily as I draw rein at the entrance to the tunnel. "They're not that kind of bombs. . . . Listen, Half Pint, I've got a hunch this guy we're waiting for won't stop when we ask him to. He will be in a car with headlights too bright for good shooting. We haven't got time to cut down a tree and there aren't any loose boulders big enough to stop him. . . ."

"But," interrupts Petra, slipping off Pepito's rump, "you think he'd stop of his own accord if he saw a young lady without any clothing on lying in the middle of the road. . . ."

"Exactly; any man would. And coming through the tunnel he'll be going slowly so that . . ."

". . . He isn't likely to run over me. All right, if you want to take a chance on losing me, I guess I can take a chance too."

Without another word she lies down catercornered in the moonlit road just outside the mouth of the tunnel. She is lying on her side with arms sprawled above her head. Her breasts stand out like pale mounds of ice-glazed snow, firm, proud, unashamed. The gentle curves of her slender waist climb the

gentle hill of her hips and fade seductively behind her moulded thighs.

I lick my lips. "Petra," I say, "you've got guts."

I lead Pepito off to one side behind a bushy rosas in full bloom. In a moment I have extracted three colorless glass pellets from the pasteboard box. Now that I see them again I remember them well. Old Hardhead only used them as a last resort because he prizes the formula too highly. His instructions are, "If you don't use them destroy them. In an enemy's hands they are your death and disgrace."

Slipping the glass pellets into the side pocket of my coat where they'll be accessible I pull the rod from my shoulder holster, break it and spin the cylinder just to see that the salt water hasn't gummed up the works.

WE DON'T have long to wait. All of a sudden I hear the soft purr of a powerful motor and a vivid streak of white light flashes along the right wall of the tunnel. As the bright beams pick out the prone body of the almost naked girl, I resist a terrific impulse to shout at Petra to jump out of the way. I may have figured wrong. What if this driver doesn't see her or is too ruthless to stop? Empty I imagine my state of mind if I were lying in that beam of light in front of that oncoming car. The light on the wall grows brighter, the purr of the motor becomes a roar, the headlights swoop into view. My mouth opens to cry out. Involuntarily I start to leap forward . . .

There is a sudden screech of brakes and the dry rasping sound of tires skidding on gravel. My heart unplugs my throat and sinks back into its cavity as I sink farther back into the shadows. The long sleek nose of a black car stops

within six feet of Petra. For a moment nothing happens as if the driver is thinking over the situation, pondering if it is a plant. Then, as if finally convinced, a slender man in a grey suit and felt hat steps into the bright swathe of headlights and stoops over the girl.

With a quick movement I slip a glass pellet from my pocket and taking careful aim toss it to the hard gravel beside the bent over figure. The pellet breaks with an almost inaudible tinkle. A puff of pale smoke bounds upward enveloping the man's head. The bent figure stiffens like a self-conscious laborer posing for his first photograph.

Waiting for a precious moment to be sure that no one else is keeping watch in the car, I step forward and, bending over, slip my hand into the inside pocket of the man's coat. Removing a brown envelope, I run rapidly through the contents by the beam of a headlight. With a terrible sinking feeling I replace the papers in the envelope and return it to the inside pocket, extracting with the same movement a large brown wallet. This contains numerous bills of large denominations, a passport with an unrecognizable picture, and a pink card with strang black characters, nothing else.

By now I feel as low as a snake's belly. I shake my head dismally. If I have to search the car for them, it's going to be a mess, perhaps if I take too long, a bloody mess.

I SLIP another glass pellet from my pocket and drop it on the ground beneath the taut, bent figure. Then rapidly I walk to the car. I could shout for joy. On the front seat where it has sat beside the driver is a small leather brief-case with a zipper top. I strip the zipper back and, hurriedly removing the

myself. . . . "100,000,000.00 pesos, silver, in full payment for the peninsular State bounded on the south and east by the Gulf of Lower California, on the west by the Pacific Ocean, on the north by the State of California of the United



"This is a stick-up," I say.
"Keep your hands away
from your pockets."

contents, take them into the light in front of the car. In a minute I have found the document.

It is on white official paper, signed and sealed with the red Governmental stamp. I am amazed at the appended signatures. A swift glance at the contents makes me gasp at the magnitude of the transaction and the colossal cheek of the nations involved. I read the long row of figures over twice to convince

States of America. . . including full and exclusive dominion over Magdalena Bay. . . ."

I whistle. To what lengths a nation will go to obtain good harbors! Magdalena Bay! The finest harbor on the west coast of North America; big enough to house an entire fleet in safety. No wonder Old Hardhead came to supervise this thing himself!

Abruptly I return to the car and re-

place the other documents in the brief case, closing it once more with the zipper. Then I leap back to the side of the road where I had been hidden and stand gun in hand waiting for the termination, as suddenly as it began, of the "superficial catalepsy". Each cataleptic bomb is strong enough to produce superficial catalepsy for a period of five minutes on any living being within three feet of its explosion. The mind of the cataleptic records nothing that passes during that time, and resumes activity at the point on which it ceased.

At almost the same instant Petra and the bent figure resume consciousness. Petra sits up with a realistic groan, her magnificent breasts swaying to the rhythm of her torso, the taut muscles of her stomach contracting and relaxing spasmodically. The man, dropping on one knee, speaks to her in a peculiar sing-song Spanish that is difficult to understand.

I speak sharply in Mex . . . "This is a stick-up!" He jumps to his feet one hand diving for his hip. "*Keep your hands away from your pockets! . . . That's better.*" I can see his face now with its broad nose and slanting eyes and I remember the strange black characters on the pink card. "Now, toss me your pocket book and, if the contents are satisfactory, you can be on your way."

With obvious relief he hurriedly delves within his coat and brings out the large brown wallet that contains so many bills. I see Petra step back into the shadows as I make a pretense of counting the money.

"*Quitate!*" I command, motioning ominously with the gun barrel.

He doesn't wait for a second invitation but leaps into the car, slams in the gears and roars away in a swirl of dust and gravel toward Lake Coyuca.

ROLLING the document into a small roll I fit it into the waterproof tube that Petra brought the bombs in, and screw on the lid. At that instant Petra comes walking out of the shadows of the tunnel, her moon-tipped breasts bouncing with each step, her lovely hips swaying seductively.

"Success and flowers," she says standing close to me and breathing deeply so that the firm pale breasts rise like white doves about to take wing.

"Don't be premature," I say. "Wait till he starts to turn over that brief case to the pilot of the seaplane. That son of Confucius will roar back miles an hour thirsty for blood."

"No, he won't," says Petra calmly. "I opened the petcock on the gas tank."

In a burst of enthusiasm I throw my arms about her and crash her to me planting a long kiss on each of her white shoulders. Her warm body sinks against me. Then suddenly over her shoulder I see a spark of yellowish light winking at me. It is the riding light of Old Hardhead's fishing smack. The port light flashes once. I thrust Petra from me.

"Sorry, Half Pint," I say, "business before pleasure. We're not out of the rough by a long shot. Don't you hear that seaplane's motor?"

From my vest pocket I extract a flat piece of cut crystal. Holding it up into the full rays of the moon with my right hand I pass my left hand back and forth across it in swift but definite movements. After a moment the riding light stops winking. The port and starboard lights flash on and I can see the boat move forward. I hand Petra the waterproof tube. She automatically hooks it to the silver chain around her neck. The roar of the motor is louder. I can see the flash of the moon on a plane above Lake Coyuca. It's heading this way.

"When Old Hardhead sails as close to the rocks as he can come, that green light will go out. Then you'll have to swim for it. Take the first hogback beyond the tunnel. It has a sloping point and you can take off without breaking your neck. Beat it. Here they come!"

SHE has hardly hit the shadows of the tunnel on her way through when the plane swerves above me. I am mounting Pepito when it dives. Something bright drops with a sickening swish. There is a blinding flash, a roar like the blast of Krakatoa. The road rocks beneath Pepito's trembling feet. The tunnel mouth yawns once, spits forth a poisonous cloud of gas and dust and with a grating snarl collapses like the jaws of death. The plane zooms upward again.

Holding the quivering Pepito in check I dare to think of Petra. Did she make the other end of the tunnel or was she crushed beneath that mass of falling rock? My stomach comes up. I am sick.

I hear the roar of the plane as it dives again. I whistle shrilly in Pepito's ear. He leaps forward and down the winding road like a streak of red lightning. Behind me I feel the hot blast of another blinding flash. My ears ache to the pressure of the explosion. I look over my shoulder. The road where we had stood a moment before is gone. In its place is a gaping chasm. I reach over and pat Pepito's straining neck.

"If she got through, old boy, she's safe. It's obvious they're not after her. They're after us."

High ahead I see the plane banking for another attack. Just as the nose tips for the dive I swerve Pepito off the *carretera* behind a huge granite boulder. I whip out my rod and fire three shots into

the fusillage as the seaplane thunders by. The flash of the third bomb almost blinds me. Pepito rears up nearly unseating me. The giant boulder trembles and rocks like a thunder-bolt has struck it, but it protects us from the fusillade of flying stones.

Pepito's eyes are rolling in panic as I edge him around the gaping crater in the road. The instant I loose the reins he bolts forward down the *carretera* toward the beach like a mad Pegasus. I am hoping we can make the sheltering recesses of the palms and mangroves near the lake before the plane returns.

Suddenly I hear a fourth explosion. I look backward. I can see the flash. It is on the hogback the other side of the tunnel. They're after Petra! That means that she escaped the collapsing tunnel. If only they don't get her now . . . I utter a silent prayer.

AS I draw Pepito up in the shadows of a clump of Spanish Daggers, I see the great flying fish zooming in a wide bank out over the ocean. Then I see the reason. Old Hardhead's fishing smack has closed in almost to the coast in answer to my signal crystal. They're going to bomb the smack. That means Old Hardhead goes . . . and maybe Petra too. They don't mean to stop until they get those papers or destroy them.

With that terrible empty feeling that comes when you see a tragedy about to happen that you are helpless to prevent, I watch the seaplane dive. It is headed swift and sure for the squatty little boat. When it seems that the nose of the bird-of-prey must almost touch the tiny mast, I see the flash and hear the mighty roar. Then another and another in quick succession!

The seaplane seems to pause in its
(Continued on page 110)

Queen of the



While the Indian held the javelin, his hands were skillfully bound.

Lady Godiva in the jungle! It couldn't be so, but, where his surveying transit pointed through the jungle, that was what met Bush Wyman's eye!

BUSH WYMAN straightened up his six feet of sinewy body from his transit and jerked a bandana handkerchief from a pocket. He mopped the perspiration from his sun-tanned face and looked along the straight cleared path that his crew were cutting through the jungle.

He stooped and placed his hard gray eye to the instrument again. His muscles tensed. Through an aperture in the verdure the gleaming figure of a girl on horseback flashed before the lens. Wy-

Flaming Arrows



By
**FRANK E.
MARKS**

man swung the barrel of his transit, tried to follow the apparition. The matted vines cut off his view. Then he saw her again as her black mount picked its way across the field of his vision. Bush Wyman's blood surged. The girl on horseback was practically nude!

The telescope brought her close. She had reined in her horse and was looking in his direction. Every detail of her glorious youthful body stood out clearly against the green background. Her slender body glowed with the whiteness of marble. Her thighs, clear-cut, over the black steed, were as matchless as sculptured alabaster. Her breasts would have done justice to a statue of Venus.

Her hair was golden, wavy, like the autumn wheat Wyman remembered back home in the States. And then, as he

stared breathlessly, the girl jerked the reins with her rounded arms. Horse and rider were swallowed up among the giant orchids and trees.

WYMAN stood up, gazed toward where the girl had disappeared. Suddenly, his body went rigid. Something vivid, like a fiery eye, whirled through the jungle leaves. It came with the speed of a comet. Bush Wyman ducked. The flaming object whizzed by his ear. He turned, looked toward the corral behind him. A burro reared on its hind legs, pawed the air with its front hoofs, whinnied, and fell to the ground.

A stableman ran to the fallen animal. The man's eyes bulged. He turned an ashen face to Wyman, shouted, "My God! Look at this!" Wyman strode to the fallen burro. It was dead.

"See what killed him?" the stableman asked.

Wyman stooped. Half the length of an arrow was embedded in the animal's chest. The forward end of the weapon had been smeared with asphalt, set afire before it had been sprung from the bow. The portion of the shaft projecting from the beast terminated with a red feather.

"Indians!" the excited mule-tender exclaimed. "None of us are safe in this damn' jungle!"

Wyman's sharp eyes saw a wrapping near the feathered end of the arrow. He opened his pocket knife, cut the fine cord that bound it to the cane rod. It was a small square of white linen paper. On it there was a message written in English on a typewriter. It read: "If you do not want to meet the same fate as your burro, come no farther." There was no signature.

Bush Wyman handed the slip of paper to the startled man beside him. "Vene-

zuelan Indians don't use English so fluently, Joe," he told him. "Neither do they have typewriters."

He took a map from his field book, spread it open. "See here," he pointed. "This is Lake Maracaibo. At the south end of it is where we unloaded the Mammoth Oil Company outfit from the steamer. We have to get the machinery through the road we're building." Wyman traced his pencil lower, inland. "This round circle is the asphalt bed reported by the airplane survey. We expect to find oil thereabouts.

"So what?" Joe wanted to know.

"You remember that other gang—the Shale Oil Company? They started two months ahead of us; took another course."

Joe nodded.

"It's my hunch they're trying to throw a scare into us, hold us back until they file on the property themselves."

"And send a note like that?" Joe asked. "It don't look like the real thing if they want to make us think it's Indians."

Wyman hunched his shoulders. "That dead burro is real enough." He left the burro keeper, went to the forward end of the cleared line where the crew was hacking at the rank vegetation. He spoke to the foreman, "Go back and run the instrument for me this afternoon. I'm going to do a little scouting ahead."

"Okay, chief."

WYMAN picked up a machete, went forward to the end of the cleared trail. He plunged into the thickness of the jungle, followed a narrow stream. Huge pitcher plants slapped his perspiring face. He slashed at them with his blade, hacked at their tough stalks, tore through the towering ferns as he trudged along the ravine.

Gay-plumaged macaws chattered in the mangrove trees above him. Monkeys with grotesque white faces gibbered from the branches. The curious bellbird sounded its solitary note; a single ring, like a gong.

Monstrous bats sailed toward Wyman's head. He struck at them. They darted upward, screeched with a sinister sound. Fat frogs croaked, jumped into slimy holes under Wyman's feet. He plodded on.

His mind dwelt on the girl he had seen through the telescope of his transit. That she had something to do with the death of the burro he was certain. Maybe the rival oil company had used her in a scheme to frighten his men. Could she be a white Indian? Wyman had read of such a tribe that lived in Venezuela's interior.

Slicing at the matted vines, ripping into the interlaced barrier that was like woven wire, Bush Wyman reached a clearing. He sat down on a mossy rock. He found a damp cigarette paper in his pocket, rolled some tobacco into a cylinder and lighted it. He blew a fog of smoke into the still air.

Abruptly, Wyman crouched, sprang to his feet. Something had swished the air behind him. Wyman wheeled. He faced a man whose descending arm wielded a club. In that split second Wyman raised his machete. The bludgeon crashed on the blade. The outer end of the club was lopped off. But the portion that remained in the man's hand furrowed down Wyman's chest, tore viciously into his flesh.

Wyman winced, felt the rapsing pain of his lacerated skin. He plunged at his attacker, raised his blade, brought it down on the man's skull. His opponent's head split like a cocoanut.

Wyman stared at the man he had

killed. "A white Indian!" he gasped. The native was bare save for moccasins and a breech-clout. His hair was like coal; his cheek bones high; mouth large and sensual.

Yells split the air as Wyman backed against a big tree. He shifted the machete to his left hand and jerked his revolver from its holster. It seemed as though every rock had come to life. Heads and shoulders of white natives appeared everywhere.

Wyman's gun spewed fire, cracked resonantly through the canyon. An Indian slumped behind a ledge. Bush Wyman's weapon spat flame at the uncoming horde. Then the hammer of his revolver snapped uselessly against an empty shell. He jammed the gun back into its holster, and raised the machete as the white Indians closed in a semi-circle about him.

A GIANT of a man stood out in their midst, watching his tribesmen. An Indian took an arrow from his quiver. The giant sprang to the native, jerked the arrow from his hand, threw it to the ground. The native made no further attempt to use his deadly darts.

Like a soft-footed puma, another white brave advanced. Wyman waited until the man was in striking distance and then slashed with his uplifted machete. The Indian sidestepped the descending blade. Wyman stumbled from his own momentum, went to his knees. He scrambled to his feet, punched out with his left fist. It landed on the jaw of the native. The man dropped backward into the muck.

Wyman's machete cut the air as another Indian approached. But the powerful hands of a man from behind clamped his arms, kept the long knife from falling. The throng of yelping natives

closed in, pinioned his legs. Wyman was dragged to the earth.

With lightning swiftness, the Indians jerked Wyman's arms behind him. Native rope was tied around his wrists. He was pulled to his feet; stood between two muscular men. They held the points of their javelins against his sides. The giant Indian who seemed to be the leader came up to his captive. He took the cartridge belt and revolver from Wyman's waist.

And then, to Bush Wyman's amazement, the leader spoke in English, "Follow me!" he ordered. The big native started forward. Wyman was prodded into action. The two guards hugged closely.

Bush Wyman was led over a trail through the forest. They cut across arroyos, plodded over knolls, slogged along the soggy bed of a stream. At last they climbed a precipitous rise, reached the top, halted. Wyman's eyes swept the valley below. It was a cleared area under cultivation. In the distance, a village sprawled. Thatched-roofed huts squatted in winding roads. The band descended the hill.

Wrinkled old men stood with open mouths; naked children gaped; squaws stared as the band reached the village and passed along its narrow street. From doorways hung with matting, young girls, white-skinned, peeped out shyly. Wyman's blood quickened as he caught glimpses of their flashing thighs, their nubile breasts and lithe bodies.

AT THE far end of the road, the leader who had spoken English, stopped. A large structure of bamboo stood back from the street. It was a two-story house. The upper section projected over the first story and had a veranda that skirted the entire building.

Brightly-colored flowers and pampas grass grew luxuriantly in the garden.

The giant leader looked up toward the veranda. Wyman's eyes followed his gaze. A door opened. A girl walked to the rail of the portico. She was nude except for a girdle of dried twisted flowers and a necklace of fresher blossoms that sheltered her breasts. Her whole body was a symphony of breath-taking loveliness. Golden hair caressed her curving shoulders. Wyman gasped. It was the girl he had seen through the telescope of his surveying instrument. And she was not an Indian!

The girl stared steadily at Wyman. She spoke something in the native dialect. The leader of the Indians bowed as she went back into her room. He gave an order to his tribesmen. They turned, left. The giant chief clapped a hand on Wyman's shoulder, gestured toward the outside stairway. Captive and captor entered the blossoming grounds. Wyman went up the steps.

He was led to the other side of the veranda. It overlooked a vast plain. Shining in the late afternoon sun, a black lake of asphalt glistened. The big native motioned to a crude chair. Bush Wyman sat down.

With the smoothness of a white swan, the golden-tressed girl appeared from another doorway. She walked to where Wyman sat on the edge of his chair. Her azure eyes surveyed him from under long lashes. Every detail of her lissom body was now within his reach. Her breasts rose and fell with a fascinating movement. Her rounded shoulders were a perfection of curves that swept gracefully to her perfect waist.

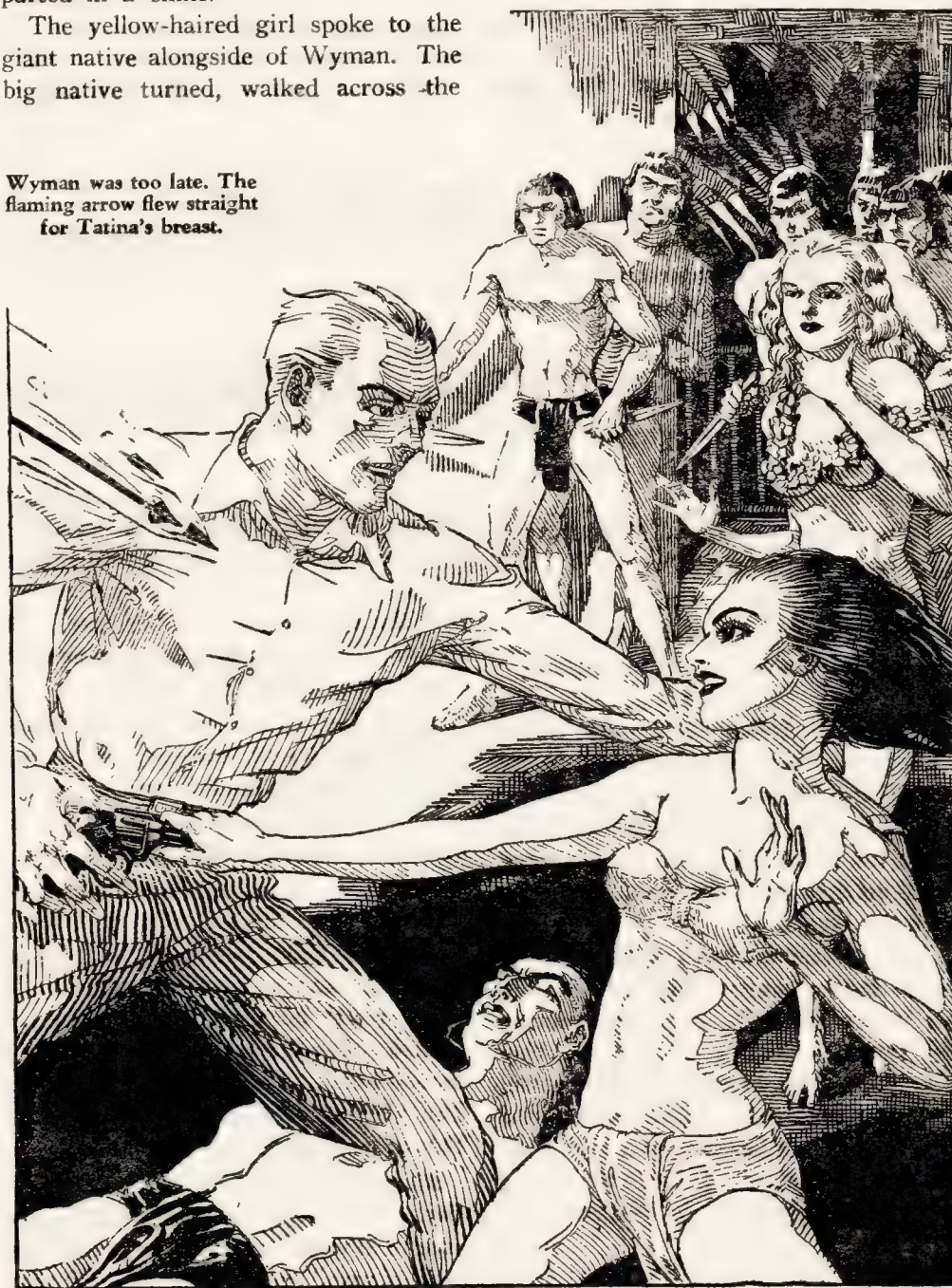
She sat down in a reclining chair opposite Wyman and clapped her palms together. A white Indian girl came out onto the veranda. She too, was nude

save for a wispy girdle. The native girl's breasts were pear-shaped and drooped slightly. Her dark eyes bored at Wyman. A hibiscus blossom was entwined in her coal-like hair. Her crimson lips parted in a smile.

The yellow-haired girl spoke to the giant native alongside of Wyman. The big native turned, walked across the

veranda and disappeared through a doorway. The white Indian girl picked up a palm leaf, waved it over the golden head of the reclining girl. The blonde riveted her blue eyes on her captive.

Wyman was too late. The flaming arrow flew straight for Tatiana's breast.



She spoke, "So, Mr. Wyman, you didn't heed my message!"

Wyman straightened, jumped to his feet. "I don't just get this set-up!" he flared. "But if the Shale Oil Company think they can scare me away by having you shoot arrows and kill my burros, it won't work!"

The girl leaned forward. Her eyes widened. "Is that what you think? You're wrong. That's more of your civilized greed!"

"Then what's it all about? Who are you? Why are you here?"

"You might not understand what it is about. My name is Marjorie Packard and I'm here because I like it!"

"You know nothing about the Shale Oil Company?"

"I know they are prospecting another field," she answered. "They won't come through our village."

Wyman's tone softened. "Would you mind untying my hands?"

The girl who had called herself Marjorie Packard spoke to the dark-haired girl. "Release him, Tatina."

THE white Indian maid went behind Wyman. Her fingers picked at the strands that bound his wrists. Her warm body was close to him. He felt soft skin brush his back, heard her deep labored breathing. At last, she freed his arms from the bonds.

The golden-haired girl spoke to Tatina in the Indian tongue. The maid arched her brows and left. In a few minutes she returned with a pitcher and clay cups, filled them, handed one to Wyman. He tasted the drink, smiled, and downed it. Marjorie set her cup on a low table.

"You may go now, Tatina," the blonde girl said sharply. The dark-haired maid left.

Alone with Marjorie Packard, Bush

Wyman drew his chair by her side. He feasted his eyes on her beauty. "How long have you been here?" he asked.

"I was born here," Marjorie answered. "My father was an anthropologist. My mother died first. Before my father passed away, he made me promise to go to the States to be educated. I did."

"And why did you come back here?"

Marjorie's eyes flared. "Because I was sick of your civilization, your greed, deceit! Here, we are free, peaceful. I learned of you and your oil company. You are coming here to destroy our homes, our farms; put up hideous derricks; drive us away!"

"But, my dear, I'm afraid you can't stop progress by shooting arrows at us."

Marjorie didn't reply. She looked helplessly at Wyman. He saw her eyes mist. He dragged his chair closer, put his hand on her shoulder. The contact with her bare flesh made tingles shoot through his veins. He felt the girl's body tremble, saw the color steal over her face. He leaned over her, put his other arm around her glowing body.

The golden-tressed girl gasped. Slowly, her arms crept outward, circled his body. Wyman's head lowered. Impulsively, feverishly, his mouth clamped over her moist ruby lips, lingered, hard.

Abruptly, she twisted from Bush Wyman, sprang to her feet. Her white body was flushed pink. Her eyes flared. "You shan't do that to me!" she flared. "I won't permit it! Once, in the States, I trusted a man like you. That's why I returned here." She clapped her hands. The giant Indian and the native girl, Tatina, came back to the veranda.

Marjorie snapped an order. The Indian chief thrust the tip of his javelin close to Wyman's chest. "Put your hands back of you!" he commanded. Wyman

obeyed. Tatina went behind Wyman. She securely rebound his wrists.

The golden-haired girl gave another order. The big Indian prodded Wyman toward the stairway. Wyman looked back at Marjorie. She stood like a statue, motionless, expressionless.

WYMAN descended the stairs to the garden below, the Indian chief at his heels. Another tribesman joined them. Wyman was marched down the road, toward the shore of the asphalt lake. They came to a log shack set among the trees. The chief pulled open the portal, thrust Wyman inside. He pointed to a cot. Wyman sat down. While the giant Indian held his spear against Wyman's side, the other native bound his ankles. The chief and his tribesman left. Wyman heard the sliding of a timber on the outside of the door.

He put his eyes to a chink between the logs of the wall beside his cot. The fiery edge of the tropical sun was dropping below the horizon of the asphalt lake. He looked at the meager furnishings of the room. He strained at his fetters. The ligaments of his muscles stood out like thongs but the fiber bonds held.

Blackness gradually enshrouded his prison. Not a sound broke the stillness. The air was dank. Sweat streamed into his eyes from his futile efforts to free himself. A listless sensation stole over him. He shook his body, tried to free it from a lethargic feeling that was overpowering him. A gray haze was swimming over his eyes in the darkness. He felt drowsy. His shoulders slumped. Vainly he tried to hold open his fluttering eyelids. But they were heavy, like velvet curtains, and closed.

BUSH Wyman awoke from the sound of a grating noise at the door of the hut. Someone was outside. He raised himself to the edge of the cot. The timber that served as a huge bolt was being slid back. The barrier creaked as it was pulled outward. Wyman made out a shadowy figure that slipped noiselessly into the room.

Bare feet padded across the floor. In the darkness, Wyman felt a bare arm encircle his neck. Hot breath fanned his face. Moist lips brushed his ear. "It's Tatina!" a voice breathed.

Wyman shook his head to clear it. He yawned, breathed deeply. "I couldn't keep awake," he said.

"That drink you had put you to sleep," Tatina replied.

Wyman's muscles tensed. "Drugged, eh?" he snapped. "Why did you come here?"

"To warn you. I overheard Atabapo, our chief who captured you. He has talked to our men. They are going to kill you!"

"For what?"

"Because you bring the oil company. Atabapo told them you would take the lake of death; asphalt, oil, our golden queen calls it. The lake is sacred to our people. They are buried there. It saves their souls!"

"Does your golden queen know they plan to kill me?"

"No," the native girl answered.

"Thanks for warning me, Tatina. But I'm afraid it's too late. I can hardly move!"

The girl sat down on the cot. She crushed herself close to Wyman. He felt her hair caress his face, her warm cheek against his own, her burning lips on his ear. "Am I not desirable, American?" her voice was deep, husky.

(Continued on page 114)

POPPY



Latore pointed to the metal floor grate. "Look!"

By **WILLIS VACHEL KEITH**

TERRY Fargo was drunk. Gloriously drunk. He hooked his elbows over the bar at Peg Leg Hartwick's *Malakka Cafe* and bawled at the top of his lungs.

"Whiskey, dammit! Whiskey!"

Peg Leg, himself, hobbled from the rear of the stinking, smoke-heavy waterfront gin-mill. Little green pig-eyes glittered in his fat, sweating face.

"What ship, sailor?" he demanded.

Terry belched dramatically. His head rolled like a puppet's. "No ship!" he shouted. "Whiskey!"

Peg Leg knew an American when he heard one. He glanced at the native Malay bartender. There was a question in his eyes the brown man understood. He nodded.

Peg Leg curled stubby fingers about Terry Fargo's hard-muscled arm. He banged the steel-sheathed peg of his wooden leg twice against the brass rail. Two bull-necked giants came out of the smoky haze. They crowded close on either side of Terry.

"Whiskey!" Terry bawled, beating a fist on the wet, sloppy bar.

Peg Leg nodded. The two giants dropped ham-like hands on Terry's shoulders, jerked him away from the bar.

Nobody, least of all the bull-necked giants, expected what happened next. Terry twisted loose, spun on his heel

and shot four steel-hard knuckles into a hair-matted face. He one-twoed, driving his left fist to the point of the giant's jaw.

The first bruiser was just in the act of folding when Terry ducked, twisted like a top and put every ounce of his one hundred seventy-five pounds behind a bone-crushing uppercut. The blow lifted the second giant off his feet, shot his head back on his shoulders, and dropped him cold as a potato.

Terry sucked his bruised knuckles, spat out the open door, and hooked his elbows on the bar.

"Whiskey!" he yelled.

Peg Leg stared at the two inert mountains of flesh sprawled at the American's feet. Beads of sweat popped out on his forehead and trickled into the fatty folds of his cheeks.

"Whiskey!" he echoed. "Make it two, Tongo! *Jameson's!*"

THREE drinks later, when the two fallen giants had crawled away to nurse their swollen jaws, Peg Leg broke the conversational ice.

"How about a woman, mister?"

Terry looked into his empty whiskey glass. The pupils of his gray eyes were contracted to bright pin points.

"White," Peg Leg added. "Young, too."

DUST

Terry looked at him through slitted eyes. He snickered and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

Peg Leg's voice dropped. "No foolin', mister. Real white ones. Chickens, young as hell. Jus' come down."

"Where?" Terry blubbered, swaying uncertainly.

"Sshh! Not so loud. I'll steer yuh right. I could use a man like yuh. I'll fix yuh up if yuh promise me one thing."

Terry grinned foolishly. "Whush 'at?"

"I need a man like yuh, mister. Big money job. Is it a go?"

Terry shook his head. "Awright. Whersh th' woman?"

"Stay here." Peg Leg hobbled to the rear of the cafe. Terry's head swung around and his glassy eyes followed him.



Terry was tough enough for the waterfront—he was the kind of man Peg-Leg needed. And it was a queer enough job they gave Terry—helping a Chinese white-slaver!

In a moment the saloon-keeper was back with a hat on his bald head. "One more drink, mister?"

Terry hiccuped. "No more. C'mon."

Outside the cafe Peg Leg hailed a rickety carriage and helped Terry in. The ancient vehicle rolled off the quay and headed for the Chinese coolie section of Malakka. Terry leaned back and closed his eyes.

Peg Leg nudged him with his elbow. "What's yuh name, mister?"

"Got none."

"No monicker? What's a man tuh call yuh?"

The ghost of a smile played about Terry's lips. In the darkness Peg Leg failed to see it. "Dynamite!" he mumbled. "Jush plain dynamite!"

"Good as any!" Peg Leg laughed. "Yuh sure hit me bonny boys like yuh wuz dynamite. Ever shipped?"

"No."

"Been long from th' States?"

"Five years."

THE carriage rolled to a stop before a large cream adobe house. It was set back from the dirt street and half-hidden behind scraggly sand-gray palms.

"All out, Dynamite!" Peg Leg said. "Kin yuh keep yuh pins?"

For answer Terry lurched out of the carriage. He came very near falling, managing to reach the trunk of a palm tree. He pulled himself erect.

Together they reached the door of the adobe house.

Peg Leg hit the heavy walnut panel a healthy smack with his fist. Footsteps sounded inside and the door opened. A Chinese in a black alpaca jacket nodded to Peg Leg and stepped out of the doorway.

Blinking as he stumbled into a sumptuously furnished foyer, Terry leaned

against the gold-leaf wall. He heard the cafe-keeper addressing the Chinese.

"Tell th' Master I'm here."

The Oriental shuffled away. Peg Leg bit off a chew from a sodden slab of tobacco. "Not a bad layout, eh?"

Terry heaved a momentous sigh. "Seen better," he mumbled.

"Where?"

"Calcutta."

Peg Leg eyed him. "Been 'round ain'cha?"

"Some. Whersh th' woman?"

"Hold yuh horses."

The Chinese servant came forward soundlessly. "Master say come—alone."

Peg Leg shifted his chew from one cheek to the other. "Be back in a minute, Dynamite." He hobbled off after the yellow man.

IN a high-ceiled, walnut-paneled room, entrance to which was gained by a steel door that rolled soundlessly back on oiled runners, Peg Leg Hartwick, cafe-keeper, faced the man who was overlord of everything illicit in the Malay States.

Latore was a product of the melting pot of Singapore. His half-caste Hindustan mother had given herself, willingly enough, to a deserter from the French Foreign Legion. She never knew whether Latore came as a result of this experience, or whether the blood of a rich Chinese trader ran through the baby's veins. In either event, he was left, at two months, on the docks, while the woman who had borne him accepted the invitation of a Manchurian goat farmer to accompany him into the mountains.

The early years had been hard for Latore. When he was ten, the Malay fisher family, who had cared for him since he was a babe, all died of scurvy. Suddenly, he found himself dependent

on his own resources. He learned quickly to steal from the fruit boats and to rob the pockets of drunken tourists. At eighteen he was trafficking in native women, supplying lithe, brown-breasted girls for the sailors of all countries whose ships dropped anchor in the Straits.

Now, at forty, imperialistically domineering behind a heavy mahogany desk in a room with a steel door, Latore was King of Vice.

He looked up as Peg Leg doffed his hat and hobbled forward. There was a slight Asiatic slant to his eyes—probably the influence of the rich Chinese trader—and a Teutonic hardness of his mouth that seemed to indicate something else in his heredity. His hair was ebony black. It glistened under the light of a glass-faceted chandelier. His skin was the color of rubbed nutmeg, combining the varied pigmentation of all the men who had paid their respects to his mother and her mother and all the mothers that had gone before.

At times, a strange softness came into Latore's face. It was mostly when his eyes licked at the loveliness of a beautiful girl. He worshiped beauty in any form. Yearly he would journey to the art marts of Paris and Vienna and bring back with him paintings and sculpture for the private gallery he maintained in Singapore.

FOR a long moment he glared at Peg Leg Hartwick. Disdain for the crippled cockney saloon-keeper was evident in the curl of his lips.

"Yes?" he questioned.

"I got th' man fer yuh, guv'nor," Peg Leg exclaimed enthusiastically. "Brains an' brawn he's got, like yuh said."

Latore snarled. "Another drunken sailor! I watched you lead the helpless sot to the door. If that's your idea of

the man I need, you had better stop looking and attend to your business! That last parcel I gave you—only a pound—hasn't gone off yet. Nine ships have sailed in the last week and you could not find a single one on which to send it! Do you imagine my clients can wait a year?"

Peg Leg gulped and colored. He knew the uselessness of making a retort. Latore demanded the final word. He backed toward the steel door.

"One moment!" Latore barked. "This man—what nationality is he?"

"American, guv'nor! A bully boy, too, guv'nor! Had a hard time standin' on 'is pins, guv'nor, an' yet he—"

"What is his name?"

"Dynamite, he sez, guv'nor an' I'm 'ere to testify—"

"What did you tell him?"

"I give 'im th' ole baited 'ook guv'nor. Th' young, white girl. He swallowed it solid." Peg Leg grimaced, pleased with himself. "Y'see, I knowed about th' new one yuh got 'ere an'—"

Latore pushed a button under the top of his desk. The steel door slid open. A moment later the Chinese servant stepped into the room.

"The man who is waiting, Ching. Take him to the room where the girl is. Lock them both in. That is all."

Latore rose as the Oriental bowed and departed. He motioned to Peg Leg.

"We shall see," he said, "whether your American is a gentleman or the man I am looking for. Come with me."

TERRY was in the same position, leaning against the gold-leafed wall, when Ching took his arm and guided him up the heavily carpeted steps. He held back recalcitrantly.

"Where to?" he shouted.

Ching's voice flowed like new honey.

Latore rose. "My daughter, Zela, Mr. Dynamite," he said.

Terry gulped. "Pleased to meet you."

Zela extended her hand. The wide sleeve of the negligee fell away from her arm.

"I am delighted," she murmured, resting the cool petals of her fingers in Terry's moist palm.

"This is the young man I have chosen to accompany you when you venture out, Zela," Latore said.

Zela's hot eyes scanned Terry's shoulders and tapered hips.

"I am certain he will be satisfactory," she said. "If you will excuse me—" She stepped through the opening in the wall. The panel closed.

Latore's voice brought Terry out of his trance. "The compensation will be five pounds a week, if that is satisfactory. Later, perhaps, I will intrust you with other duties. Naturally, the remuneration will then be greater. You will occupy the room you had last night. My servant will be at your command."

"Okay," Terry said. "What about that blonde I saw last night. Where is she?"

"That," Latore replied, "will come later. For the present you had best forget her existence. You understand?"

Terry shrugged. "All right by me."

Latore offered a five pound note. "You will be free to come and go as you please, unless my daughter desires your services. That is all."

Terry was scarcely out of the studio when a withered, hunch-backed Oriental slid up to the desk. Latore addressed him rapidly in a Malayan dialect. The hunch-back grunted a reply and was gone.

A WEEK later, Zela and Latore were together in the study. The Eurasian woman smoked a cigarette through a long ivory holder.

"I should say he is perfect for your purposes," she said.

Latore's lips curled. "And for yours?"

"What do you mean?" Her shoulders squared and her breasts lifted under a loose-bodied blouse.

"I have no objections," Latore said. "However, do not lead yourself into believing that the American is infatuated with you. Time and again he has inquired for his country-woman. I assure you if I should allow him to see her—"

Zela's breath hissed through her lips. Contempt was mirrored in her seductive eyes. She pressed her blood-tipped fingers to the hill of a breast.

"You think so," she murmured.

Latore shrugged. "What difference? I think you are right about him. I have had him followed each time he went out alone. I am convinced he will have no objections. If you will adjourn to your room, I will see him." He pushed a button. Zela departed through the open panel into her boudoir.

LATORE motioned Terry to a chair when he came into the study. "It is time to take you into my confidence," he said. "However, I should first like to warn you that betrayal means death. You understand?"

"And how!"

"Very well. You have probably wondered as to my means of livelihood. Briefly, I am a dealer in opium. However, since the Mongolian growers of poppies have little or no use for money, I have been forced to develop another medium of exchange. Therefore, since their greastest desire is for women whose skin is white, I have been trading English and American girls for their wares."

He paused while his eyes studied the expression on Terry's face. It was non-committal. "The girl you met the first

night is to be delivered to a bandit chief on the morrow in return for ten pounds of opium. Naturally, securing these girls

tore. I'm no prude but when it comes to sending decent women—"

"You measure decency in a strange



Like a trapped animal the girl followed his every movement.

is by no means easy. For the most part they are women who come to the East in entertaining troupes. It will be your duty to meet them at the American Hotel or in the cafes and lure them here. After that I will do the rest."

Terry shook his head. "Not me, La-

manner, my friend," Latore interrupted. "These women are chips on the sea of life. I am giving them, at least, a permanent home. They are the lowest of the low."

"Not that blonde dame. She was class."

"Beautiful white girl, sir. Velly beautiful."

Terry grunted. "Where's my buddy? Where's the guy with the wooden stump, huh?"

"Come later," Ching murmured.

On the second landing Ching led the way to a door. He unlocked it and urged Terry into a large room. The door slammed and the key grated.

Terry swayed on wide-set legs. He blinked and rubbed his hand over his eyes. For a split second he seemed to snap out of his stupefied state as he stared at the wide-eyed, terror-stricken girl cowering on a couch in the corner.

You might expect to find a girl like that dining at the Ritz or, lolling on the beach at Newport, but certainly not in a filthy hell-hole like Malakka.

She was beautiful—and young. Long, golden hair fell in high-lighted waves far below her hunched shoulders. Her cheeks were white with fear and her lips were scarlet splashes in the alabaster mask. Dark blue eyes—terror bright—met his. Terry could see where once they might have been limpid, swimming pools. Now they were like hard sapphires.

She was dressed in a cheap cotton frock. The hem was ragged and there was a rip down the side. Her arms were crossed over her breasts but even that protection failed to shield completely the nubile firmness of the twin, flesh-round globes. She wore neither shoes nor stockings. Her legs were slim and gently curved where the calves swelled.

Terry glanced about the room. There were no windows. A grate in the ceiling indicated a ventilation system. He lurched forward hungrily, arms outstretched.

The girl screamed and darted off the couch, backing into an opposite corner.

Her arms were down at her sides now and Terry could see the sweet curves of her body even under her formless dress. He licked his lips as her soft, deep-set breasts rose and fell. His eyes dropped to the sweep of her hips and the outline of her thighs beneath thin cotton.

"Be sociable, baby!" he blurted.

The girl trembled like a leaf. Her face was devoid of color, like a sheet of snow-white paper.

Terry groped in his pockets and brought out a package of native, brown paper cigarettes. He lit one quickly and blew a gray funnel of smoke ceilingward. He heard a faint shuffle above him. The pupils of his gray eyes flickered.

"Cigarette, baby?" he questioned.

The girl's quivering lips gave forth no sound. Like a trapped animal she followed his every movement, waiting for the attack she seemed to know was coming.

Terry took one more drag at the cigarette then dropped it to the floor. He made four stabs with his foot before he ground the butt under his heel, almost going off balance. His bleary eyes burned at the cowering girl.

"C'mere!" he growled.

THE girl was a graven image, tense. Even her breasts had no movement as she held her breath. Her neck muscles stood out like whipcords.

Terry moved toward her, swaying drunkenly. She waited until he was within arm's reach to duck past him to the momentary safety of the other side of the room. Terry's hand shot out. Steel fingers clamped her wrist. A piercing scream made the tight-ceiled room alive with high-pitched horror as Terry jerked her body into his arms.

Like a wildcat she writhed and strug-



gled. Her dress dropped off one shoulder, baring the creamy loveliness of the upper slope of a breast. Before Terry's fingers could tear it farther, the girl raked five sharp nails across his face.

Bellowing like a stuck pig, Terry released her. But only for a moment. His face, contorted with unspeakable rage, he lunged at her, smashing the flat of his hand against the side of her head.

The blow knocked her across the room and down on the couch. Terry leaped after her. His arm shot out. One

wrench ripped her cotton dress from her body. She wore only a tattered slip beneath it. Terry's eyes ran up the mother-of-pearl smoothness of exposed flesh. The plane of her stomach melted into luxuriously rounded hips. One cheek, where Terry's palm had struck, was pink with mounting color. Her breath came in great gasps.

Terry swayed backward. He waved the girl's torn dress above him, yelling triumphantly. Then, suddenly, as though the liquor he had imbibed had finally

become too much for him, his knees buckled and he crumpled to the floor, out cold!

For a long moment the girl stared at his inert body, unable to fully realize that she had temporarily escaped. Tears filled her eyes. Her shoulders twitched. She buried her face in a cushion, sobbing hysterically.

IN his walnut-panaled retreat, Latore counted bank-notes into Peg Leg Hartwick's outstretched hand.

"Ten pounds?"

Peg Leg's eyes were live coals. "Tha's right, guv'nor. He's th' man ain't he? No gentleman, that bully boy, guv'nor! See 'im strike 'er down?"

Latore wiped his hands one against the other as though to clean them of the taint of the bank-notes. "You will see that the package I gave you gets aboard a ship. That is all."

Peg Leg thumped to the door. "Sure thing, guv'nor an' thanks ter yuh."

Latore pushed a desk button. The steel door slid back. Ching was waiting.

"Show him out, Ching. Then remove the drunkard from the girl's room. Put him to bed. When he awakens, let me know."

Ching nodded. Latore pressed a second button. The steel door closed soundlessly. He walked across the room. The tips of his heavily ringed fingers touched a spot on the wall. One of the panels slid up. Latore stepped through and into a gorgeously furnished boudoir. Resting on a silk brocade *chaise longue* was a voluptuous raven-haired woman.

She smiled a greeting, her blood-red lips parting to reveal two rows of even white teeth. A marabou-trimmed negligee was loosely draped about her undulating figure. The saffron-hued full-

ness of her conical breasts was visible through the diaphanous chiffon.

Latore approached the couch, accepted her outstretched hand, and kissed the long, tapering fingers. Her eyes, naturally almond-shaped, slitted until the long, curling lashes almost came together.

"I have been waiting," she murmured, sliding her sinuous hips to make room for Latore on the *longue*.

He sat beside her. One hand dropped to a knee, silk covered. The other moved sensuously up the roundness of an arm until it reached her bare, flesh-warm shoulder. Her lips parted and her eyelids fluttered. She sighed softly.

"I have found the man I need, Zela. An American."

She curled an arm about Latore's neck. "Must it always be business?" Her breasts swelled majestically under their cob-web sheath. She drew his head down. "Kiss me!"

Latore held back. "It is important, Zela."

A frown crossed her beautiful face. Her arm dropped to her side. "It is possible that the white girl is important, too!" she snapped.

Latore's eyes flashed. The muscles of his jaws twitched. He was about to utter harsh words but instead he drew a deep breath.

"At times I am amazed at your lack of mentality, my beautiful one," he said. Idly his fingers moved over her shoulder, tracing patterns. Hot lights flamed in Zela's pupils. Her body writhed under the exquisite flesh torture.

"Kiss me!" she gasped.

LATORE lowered his mouth to her moist lips. Her lips parted. He could barely restrain himself from clasping her burning body in his arms. But he did, sitting erect, breathing heavily.

"First you will listen to me," he said softly. "This American will take your place, providing I am assured of his trustworthiness. That will be for you to discover. You will treat him kindly, as only you know how. You will even make love to him, if necessary. Learn everything you can. Of course, I will have him followed wherever he goes. At present he is asleep. When he awakens, I will have him brought to my study. You will enter at a propitious moment. Is that clear?"

Zela's slim fingers caressed Latore's cheeks. "Yes," she whispered. "Tell me now, my lover. Who is the most beautiful woman on this earth?" Her hips arched gently.

Latore pressed her warm body to his own. His hands laved the warmth of her shoulders, her smooth back. His lips forged themselves to the well-spring of her mouth.

TERRY Fargo sat up in bed. He started to swallow but changed his mind. His mouth felt like a piece of pickled tripe. He had a hell of a headache. He rubbed his hand over his face and grimaced. What he needed now, he thought, was a good stiff drink.

"Whiskey!" he yelled.

The door of the room opened. Ching stepped inside. "You called, sir."

Terry blinked. "Yes! Get me a drink! Whiskey!"

Ching's expression was blank. "You wish, perhaps, the bath first, sir?"

"Bath? Hell, no! Get me whiskey!"

Ching nodded and departed. Terry pushed the covers down. He seemed faintly surprised to see himself dressed in rich silk pajamas. He remembered vividly what had gone before, even to the blonde girl on the couch. He could never forget her.

Ching returned with a glass of whiskey. Terry gulped it down, swung out of bed. A new suit of clothes and fresh linen were spread out on a table.

"There will be something else, sir?" Ching questioned.

Terry scratched his head. "Maybe that bath. Where is it?"

A HALF-HOUR later, freshly shaved and clothed, Terry watched the steel door to Latore's study open. He walked in, swinging his shoulders jauntily, his gray eyes riveted on the face of the man behind the desk.

"Greetings!" he said.

Latore smiled. "Good morning. Do you feel better?"

"Much. Who do I thank for these duds?"

"It is unnecessary to thank anyone. Your name, I am given to understand, is 'Dynamite'?"

"Correct."

"You have no other name? No family name?"

"Never had a family."

"I see. Well, it does not matter. I am Latore."

"Glad to know you."

"You desire employment, Mr. Dynamite?"

"That's right."

"I may have employment for you. I am anxious to secure a bodyguard for my daughter. Malakka is not the most law-abiding of places. I have been told you are fearless."

ZELA, in the boudoir, regarded the moment as propitious. The wall panel slid up and she came into the study. Now her tall, siren's body was clothed in a red satin negligee. Her left hand held it closed under her swollen breasts. Terry gaped at her as she came forward.

"A stray fish that happened to fall into my net. Most of them, however, are hardened." His lips twisted. "And even the one of whom you speak. If you saw her now, you might change your mind."

"What do you mean?"

Latore drummed his finger-tips on the desk. "Merely that she had become resigned to whatever fate I have in store for her. Come, I will show you."

They mounted the steps to the third floor of the house. Latore opened the door of a room. He pointed to a metal grate in the floor.

"Look!"

DOWN on his knees Terry peered into the room below. The blonde girl was reclining on the couch. A silk kimono she was wearing was half open at the front, baring glimpses of her high, luscious breasts and the modeled sweep of her hips. A wrinkled, yellow Oriental ran his spider hands down her sides while his thick lips kissed her mouth. She moaned and writhed. Her arms circled the yellow man's neck, drawing him to her.

Terry stood erect. "I don't get it," he said. "How come the quick change?"

Latore smiled wisely. "A simple Oriental preparation, my friend. You see how utterly depraved the girl is. When her Mongolian master comes for her, she will go willingly."

"This job," Terry said. "What's it worth?"

"One hundred pounds for each girl you bring me. I can use as many as you can find."

Terry's knuckles were white through the skin of his hand. "All right," he muttered. "When do I start?"

Latore shrugged. "As soon as you desire." The vice king's eyes narrowed. "But, remember, my friend, that secrecy

is the essence. I have ways of knowing whether or not you are working for Latore or not."

Terry passed his forefinger across his throat. He grinned. "Something like that?"

"Something, my friend."

As he passed alone through the lower hall, Terry heard a soft voice calling. He turned to see Zela motioning from a doorway that was another entrance to her boudoir.

"Latore has told you everything?" she questioned, once Terry was in the room and the door was closed. Her hands slid up to his shoulders, fingering meaningfully.

"Yes."

Her voice dropped. "You must be careful. You are being constantly watched. Latore is not the man with whom to trifle." She moistened her carmine lips. "I tell you this because—because—" Her body swayed forward. Terry felt her breasts mashing against his chest. He inhaled the pungent perfume of her lips as she pressed their parted moistness to his mouth.

Hot, thrilling sensations swept over Terry. The Eurasian's mouth was a blow-torch for heat.

She drew away, panting. "Now you know," she whispered. "Some other time when there is no danger, yes?" Her eyes were star-bright.

Terry nodded. He backed to the door, still trembling from the avidness of her caress.

SOMEHOW he found his way to the quay and Peg Leg Hartwick's cafe. At the bar he had two whiskies. It was just enough to warm him for the work he had to do. He was finishing the second drink when Peg Leg hobbled up.

"H'ya. Dynamite!"

"Okay," Terry replied. "Thanks a lot for that job."

The saloon keeper's voice dropped. "You in with Latore?"

"Yes."

"Good boy! I knowed yuh'd fit in." He motioned to the bartender. "Two whiskies, Tongo!"

When he backed away from the bar an hour later, Terry was reeling. He stumbled out into the street, glassy-eyed. A native woman, carrying a basket, bumped against him. Terry yelled bloody murder as he struck the woman across the face. She fell and rolled into the road.

A white-turbaned policeman on the docks saw the drunken assault. He came on the run, swinging his club. Terry ducked it and plowed his fist into the policeman's belly. That done, he spun like a top and went out cold.

THE first officer's shrill whistle brought two more white-turbaned minions of the law. Despite Peg Leg's protestations, Terry was bundled into a wagon and driven off to the local station house.

A night in jail sobered him up. He was released in the morning and went immediately to the American Hotel. Late in the afternoon a carriage drove up to the door of Latore's adobe residence. Terry helped a stunning auburn-tressed girl out of the conveyance.

Ching admitted them. "Master like to see you—alone," he said.

Terry turned to the girl. "I'll just be a moment, Margot."

Latore was standing behind his desk when Terry entered his study. His face was dark.

"One more episode of that nature, my friend, and we will sever connections."

Terry grimaced. "I just took a few

drinks too many. But I got a girl for you."

"I have seen her enter."

"Want me to bring her in? I told her—"

"She has already been taken to a room," Latore said quietly.

Terry's head jerked. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I said, my friend. No time is wasted. I wish to prepare her for the visit of my Mongolian customer. Possibly he would prefer her to the fair-haired girl. I will give him a choice." He opened the top drawer of his desk. "And secondly, it is not my desire to have any evidence in view when the British authorities arrive!"

His hand snapped out of the drawer holding a blunt-nosed automatic.

"Did you imagine for one moment, my friend, that I might be fooled by so shoddy a ruse?" Latore's voice was exasperatingly smooth. "You knew you were being followed and realized how impossible it would be to reach the authorities. And so, cleverly, in your bungling fashion, you managed to have yourself arrested. No doubt you have already informed the Colonial police as to my activities. You shall not live to bear witness against me!"

Terry blanched. There was nothing to do now but brazen it out. Either that or—

His next move indicated the decision. He shoved the desk toward Latore, ducking behind it. The massive piece of furniture slid across the polished floor. The gun in Latore's hand belched fire a moment before he was hit at the hips. A singing bullet whizzed over Terry's head and flattened against the steel door.

Terry shot up and vaulted over the desk. Luckily Latore's weapon had spun

(Continued on page 110)

PYGMY MAGIC

[Continued from page 39]

FOR long hours Don stared into the darkness. The echo of Andrews' chugging boat floated back up the river. Moreland groaned aloud. He knew the demented man's words were true. There was no chance for rescue. Andrews lay outside. The two women would soon share a like fate as soon as Griggs, the madman, tired of them. Then Griggs would lie in wait for the plane and swear he was the only survivor. Andrew's store of uncut jewels would make him wealthy for life. Moreland groaned again.

Dawn came. He could no longer hear the boat. He knew thirst, knew the gnawing pains of hunger. But worst of all, bleak fear gripped his heart. Over and over he pictured his woman in the desecrating hands of the demented Griggs. He rolled and twisted, closed his eyes but could not blot out the vision. He even prayed for death to take the horrible mental scene from him. He couldn't stand it.

As midday lighted the shack more and more, his eyes grew able to pierce the gloom. He started. Some six feet away from his bound ankles was the fourth plunger, the key to the dynamite beneath the house itself! Andrews' last resort! He inched toward it a little at a time, painfully, his bound body cramped and deadened. Death! That's what he needed! Death! *That's what he wanted!* Irene was worse than dead. Andrews was dead. Painful inch by painful inch he made his way toward the dynamite plunger.

Now he was over it. He worked his

feet up the wall ready to drop them on the plunger that would send the hut and its contents roaring aloft in the stillness of the swamp. *Death!*

Then he heard it, a scratching, whimpering cry. Presently, dripping water, slime-covered, Tuona crawled through the doorway and collapsed on the floor. Her body gleamed red from many wounds, showed great welts and bruises where the slime had washed away. Presently she revived and a few moments later Don Moreland was free.

Griggs had finished with Tuona and had cast her overboard, believing her to be dead. Tuona had obtained a pygmy canoe and returned for the body of her master and mate. Griggs had shot her once through the shoulder. In her crude way she refused to say anything concerning the fate of Irene other than that she was alive.

Dully she hunkered down, a hand covering a bleeding gash on her breast while Don gouged out a shallow grave for Andrews. He wouldn't have stopped that long, except that she refused to guide him until he did.

PRESENTLY they were in the water in the small dugout, Moreland paddling like mad as she gestured straight ahead. Beneath the swamp plants, around mangrove roots where lurked slimy swamp creatures. On and on they went until Don's muscles were one exquisite pain. Blood throbbed and pounded at his temples. Suddenly, the green swamp mist began to grow thinner, the stench less pronounced. Don sniffed hungrily,

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redoubled his efforts as he smelled the fresh salt air of the open sea.

They shot out of the trees. Not a hundred yards away the little auxiliary schooner rode at anchor. There was no one in sight aboard her. The canoe shot forward. Don glanced down at the big war club at his feet, glanced forward at the stony-faced Tuona. In her right hand she bore a six foot slender rod of bamboo.

They were still unobserved as they made the schooner. Noiselessly Don went aboard. A step forward, another. The door of the cabin flew open and Griggs stood there a gun in his hand.

"Welcome, mate," he said. "Stand right where you are. I was just having a little pastime. See?"

He threw the door wide. Even in the dimness of the cabin Don could make out the white form of the woman he loved lashed to the bunk.

"Don, Don," she moaned. Her eyes were piteous.

A low growl rumbled in Don's throat, his hands gripped the war club. He stepped forward. Griggs raised the revolver and shot him in the hip.

As Don hit the deck, the war club clattered towards Griggs. Griggs laughed, kicked it overboard.

"You damned fool," he giggled, "I'll—"

A surprised expression overspread his face. He gazed down at the center of his chest. Something had thudded against bone. Imbedded there in the flesh was a dart, a tiny blowgun dart.

Don began to laugh hysterically, then the pain of his wounded hip got him. Everything went black.

HE AWAKENED to find Irene cradling his throbbing head, wrapping soft cloth about his bleeding hip. Past her he could see Tuona sitting in the stern, staring back in the direction of the mud island where her lord and master was buried. There was no expression on her face. Across her naked knees she still held the blowgun.

"Griggs, where's Griggs?"

Irene shuddered, gestured over her shoulder. "The dart was poisoned," she said.

Griggs lay hideously where he had fallen. His head and limbs were puffed and swollen, rapidly blackening. The face was contorted in a grimace of utter agony and from the bony chest blood was oozing in a thousand places like tiny red drops of perspiration.

Don shuddered, turned back to the lips that awaited him. Overhead a great white plane droned and prepared to settle on the quiet waters of the muddy bay.

Look for another of Clint Morgan's yarns—

"SON OF THE SEA"

—in next month's *Spicy-Adventure*

CARBOY OF DEATH

[Continued from page 65]

HE staggered to his goal. The yellow men were leaping at him, clubbing him with emptied guns. He felt blood flooding into his mouth, seeping through his gag, filling his lungs. And then—

He reached that carboy of green, lethal gas. He smashed it over with his shoulder.

It crashed to the floor; broke into countless shards. And the tentacles of thick green gas seeped swiftly across the room, like spreading, ectoplasmic snakes. . . .

Lola screamed again. She ran for the laboratory door. The five yellow men hurled themselves at the exit at the same time. Their bodies jammed in the doorway. Frantically they struggled; tried to escape. But it was already too late.

The green gas had reached them.

Dan Landon, writhing on the floor, forced his eyes open. Dimly he saw Lola and her five yellow lovers clutch at their throats; as if from a far distance he heard them screaming in tortured agony. Their shrieks were like a mounting, triumphant music to Landon's failing ears. They were dying . . . dying. . . .

He closed his eyes wearily. He had avenged his friend. And content in that knowledge, Dan Landon died.



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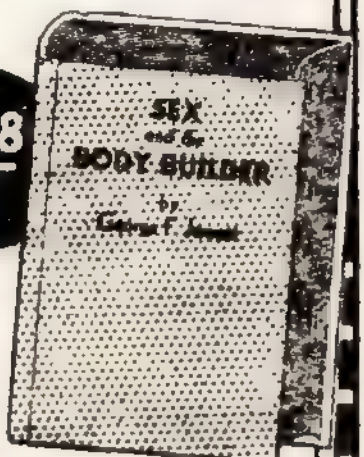
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Blood Has Sticky Fingers

[Continued from page 85]

dive, hover for a moment undecided whether to drop more death-dealing eggs, and finally, with a violent lurch to one side, hurtles nose down into the silver water like a great grey pelican diving for a carp.

The wave caused by the falling ship almost swamps the little smack and, as Old Hardhead's frail boat careens on the crest of the mountain of water, I see silhouetted against the sky the hunter that brought down the bird-of-prey. Smoke is still pouring from the mouth of the long shiny muzzle of an anti-aircraft gun poking its nose up from the hatch like an angry snake.

"Give Old Hardhead three rousing ones," I say softly to Pepito. "He always thinks of everything."

At that instant I see a slender figure in a grey suit and dark felt hat walking across the white sand toward the ocean. I look back in the direction from which he came. The long nosed car is standing beside the bright water of the lake, lights out, bleak and deserted looking.

Suddenly the walking figure stops on a little mound of sand and throws up his hands in supplication. His very bearing pleads, "I beg forgiveness for my failure." The bright moon lights up his face. I gasp. It is the slant-eyed man we robbed. I have taken it for granted he is in the fallen plane.

A queer tightness clutches at my heart as I watch the Oriental kneel. He takes off his coat and spreads it on the sand. He unbuttons his white shirt. Growing horror halts my breathing. Almost magically there appears in his right hand a slender shaft of steel that blinks mercilessly in the moon rays. The thin shaft flashes inward, buries itself to the hilt that holds it. The taut body trembles a little.

Then the hand, clasped so tightly about the haft of the blade that I can see the knuckles whiten, describes a slow, steady, undeviating circle. Hot blood spurts in dark streams across the white sand. Without a sound the kneeling figure keels forward on his face. Hara-kiri has saved another from disgrace.

POPPY DUST

[Continued from page 105]

from his hand when the desk mowed him down. He was on his knees when Terry hit him.

LIKE two jungle beasts they clawed at each other, rolling over and over to the far wall. Terry saw an opening and shot his fist into it. His knuckles

went numb as they cracked Latore's jaw. The man quivered and lay still.

At the desk Terry fumbled with the concealed buttons. The steel door slid open, revealing Ching with a bright-bladed knife in his right hand. Terry lunged for the automatic on the floor. His fingers touched it just as he heard

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the knife sing out of the Oriental's fingers. Blindly he twisted his body to one side. The deadly blade whizzed over his chest.

Terry pumped two shots at the opening in the wall. The first one went wild but the second bullet caught Ching between the eyes. His arms jerked up and he dropped lifeless, blood pouring from the black hole in his forehead.

Turning to see whether Latore showed any signs of recovery, Terry's eyes bulged. The knife Ching had thrown was buried hilt deep in Latore's throat! The man's head rested in a pool of his own crimson gore! He was dead from a severed jugular!

Gun in hand Terry dashed up the steps. He had no way of telling where Margot and the blonde girl were held imprisoned. Only when he heard a shrill, hysterical scream was he led to the door of a room. He threw it open. Margot was backed against a wall while the same shriveled Chinese whom Terry had seen before with the blonde, lashed a black, braided whip across her.

Terry clubbed his gun, leaped forward, and brought the butt down on the yellow man's head. There was a hollow thud. The Oriental dropped like an empty sack.

"WE apprehended the wooden-legged saloon-keeper," Major Gran-

ville, head of the Colonial Police informed Terry. "He made a complete confession. And we certainly owe a debt of gratitude to you and the American Secret Service for cleaning up this foul mess for us."

Terry bowed in the direction of Margot Kingsley. "Miss Kingsley's willingness to co-operate was a great help."

The English girl smiled. "I have battle scars to show for it. I never knew whips could hurt that much."

Terry turned to the little blonde girl. She had recovered from Latore's administration of drugs.

"And next time, Miss Lord, you won't decide to take a trip around the world unaccompanied and let yourself be influenced by exotic foreign strangers."

Ann Lord heaved a deep sigh. "Next time, Mr. Fargo, you might accompany me."

Terry had a vivid recollection of her almost nude loveliness. "I might at that," he replied.

Major Granville drew Terry aside. "One of my men found that woman you mentioned. She was in the basement. Her throat had been cut."

Terry nodded. "I expected as much. It was she who told me I was being followed. I'm sorry." He thought of the one time her lips had burned against his. "It's dark in the shadow of the poppy," he said softly.

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Queen of the Flaming Arrows

[Continued from page 93]

A thought flashed through Bush Wyman's mind. "I could tell better if I wasn't tied up," he told her.

Wantonly, the girl dropped across his lap. Her warm flesh sent thrills through his frame. For a moment she lay still, breathed audibly through her mouth. She sat up, perched herself boldly on his lap. Her arms wound around his neck. She whispered, "If I untie you, American—will you love me?"

Bush Wyman's pulse leaped. "Try me and see," he answered.

TATINA slipped off his knees, crept over the cot to his back. She tugged at the cords that bound his wrists, bit them with her teeth. The strands loosened. Wyman jerked his arms free. The native girl slid to the floor, picked at his ankle bonds until the knots were untied. Wyman stood up, took a few steps around the room. He returned to the cot, sat down close to the girl.

She moved closer to him. He put an arm around her bare shoulders, drew her tightly. His other hand strayed over her throat, down her shoulders to her waist. She gasped. Tatina pressed her hands over his, crushed his fingers. Her body tensed.

She threw herself backward, dug her nails into the back of his neck, pulled him down. Her hot breath was like desert air on his face. He lowered his head to her wet lips. Tatina sighed in the depths of her throat, held him vise-like. Her mouth bruised against his.

Suddenly, Bush Wyman straightened

from his relaxed position. He sprang to his feet. Tatina jumped. Long flickering bands of yellow light danced through the partly-opened door.

Tatina grasped Wyman's hand. "It's the men—the ones Atabapo talked to. They're coming for you, American!" She pulled Wyman to the door.

The native girl led him to a path at the rear of the shack. She stopped, pointed. "Follow around the black lake, American!"

Wyman ran through the darkness, kept close to the asphalt bed. He could hear the distant shouts of the natives back in the shack from which he had just fled. He came to the back of the two-story house where he had talked with the golden-haired girl, Marjorie Packard. There was a light in one of the upper rooms. And as he looked up, his blood went icy. A scream had knifed the night air.

Wyman vaulted the low fence to the garden. He went cautiously up the outside stairway. Treading softly, he advanced along the veranda, came to a door that was screened with a fiber hanging. He peered inside. His flesh crept.

Marjorie Packard was clamped tightly in the arms of the muscular chief, Atabapo. She was beating her fists against his chest. She bent backward, tried in vain to escape. She twisted her half-clothed body, tore from his grasp, backed against the wall. "Don't touch me, Atabapo!" she screamed. "I'll have you killed for this!"

The Indian chief scowled. "My people no longer obey you. Already I talk to them. They kill the American tonight!"

Bush Wyman saw Marjorie's eyes widen with fright. Her mouth opened. She went chalk white. "No harm must come to this white man!" she flung.

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Atabapo advanced toward the cringing Marjorie. "There is still time to save him." He smiled wryly.

"Then do it—hurry!" the yellow-haired girl spoke breathlessly.

The Indian chief's eyes glistened. "Atabapo promise if—" he hesitated, stared avidly at the girl's milky body.

"If what, Atabapo?"

"If the golden queen be my wife—like I read in your books!"

MARJORIE'S body went rigid. She looked blankly at the chief who demanded his reward—like the men of civilization. Her figure was as motionless as a statue. Her lips parted slowly, "All right, Atabapo. I promise. But first you must free Wyman, see him safely back with his people."

Atabapo shook his head. "I want you first, now!" He went to her, put his sinewy arm around her slender waist. His right hand drew her irresistibly. Marjorie's finger nails dug into her palms. She didn't move. Her face was colorless, resigned. Atabapo's head lowered toward hers.

And at that moment Bush Wyman hurtled his body through the doorway. His iron fingers tore into the native's naked shoulders, pulled him backward with mighty force. Atabapo crashed to the floor, murderous rage flaming from his obsidian eyes as he recognized his attacker.

The native chief got to his feet with the swiftness of a plunging hare. His hand went to his loin cloth. A knife flashed. Marjorie screamed. Wyman hunched his broad shoulders. The Indian leaped like a tiger, swung his blade in a vicious trajectory. Wyman sidestepped, thrust out his foot. Atabapo tripped, sprawled on the floor.

Wyman dived after him. The Indian

twisted, got his shoulders squared and raised his blade as Wyman landed. The sharp edge of the knife sliced along Bush Wyman's arm, cut the cloth of his shirt. Blood soaked the flannel. Wyman ground his jaws together, clamped down with both hands, pinioned the wrist of the native.

Atabapo rolled his powerful body, carried Wyman over with him. Bush Wyman clung tenaciously to his adversary. Wyman's head cracked against the partition as they struck the wall. His grip loosened on the Indian. Atabapo jerked free, got to his knees, struck down with his dagger. The steel went through Wyman's sleeve, jammed into the floorboards.

Wyman ripped loose from the knife, came to his feet. His fist shot out with a mighty swing. It fetched up with crushing power on the native's mouth. Crimson drooled from the man's shattered teeth. He staggered backward, tripped, went down, lay inert.

Sandaled feet pattered on the stairway outside. They raced along the veranda, came to the doorway of the room. Wyman's eyes riveted on a half dozen Indians who stopped at the threshold. Red fury possessed Wyman. He crouched, doubled his huge fists as the forward native drew a murderous-looking knife.

AS Bush Wyman, nerves edged, waited his chance, a gap opened between two of the Indians at the door. A figure glided between them, darted into the room, to Wyman. It was Tatina, the native girl who had released him in the cabin. She poked a revolver in Bush Wyman's hand, spoke breathlessly, "Your gun, American! I found it—loaded it for you!"

As Tatina spoke, there was a whir-

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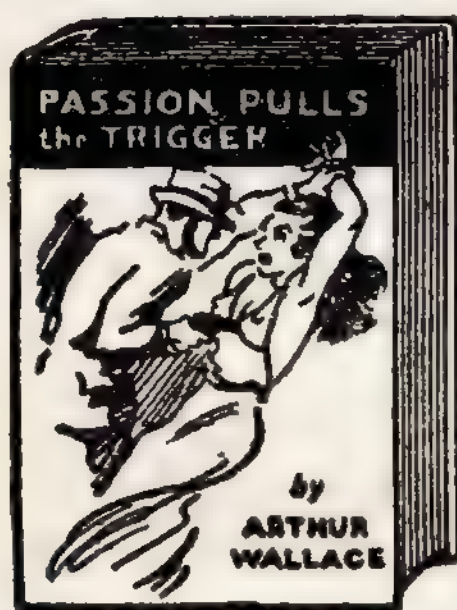
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ring sound. A shaft with a burning eye—a flaming arrow—such as had killed the burro, sailed into the room through a window. Bush Wyman reached out for the Indian girl. He was too late. The deadly shaft plunged into Tatina's naked breast. She sobbed, sank. Scarlet rivulets trickled over her white skin.

Wyman backed up against the wall. His revolver spat. The forward native crumpled, dropped. Yellow fire from Wyman's weapon belched at another Indian. The man stopped as if petrified, fell. Wyman fired toward the door. A slug tore into a native's arm. Terror suddenly seized the Indians on the veranda. They turned, fled down the stairway. Silence fell in the room.

Wyman ran to the dying Tatina. She looked up. Her weary eyes fluttered. Her lips moved slowly, wistfully. "You—you're nice, American," she murmured.

Bush Wyman leveled his gun at the prostrate chief. Marjorie ran to Wyman. Her eyes were wet. "Don't kill Atabapo!" she pleaded. "Let him live—rule his people. I have taught them too much of my civilization. I—I don't belong here."

Bush Wyman put his arm around the golden-haired girl. "You mean you will go back with me?"

Marjorie looked steadily into his eyes. Her face flushed. Her breasts throbbed provocatively. She nodded. "If you'll take me, Bush Wyman."

Wyman clasped her quivering body, pressed her tightly, felt her warm against him. Her firm breasts mashed on his chest. "I want you forever, my darling," he said.

Marjorie reached up with her rounded arms, drew down his head. She turned up her moist lips. Bush Wyman's mouth closed over hers. . . .

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BLOOD AND FIRE

[Continued from page 27]

great strokes through the air but the Spartan merely flexed his wrist. The balance was excellent. No need to show off. Strength was precious. He was tense. His knees shook. Would the signal ever come? It did.

THE Gaul, intent on winning in a rush, charged forward with a powerful sword-blow started behind his back. Spartacus slid the blow off his shield. No need to take the shock of the blow. He countered with a fast, waist-high sweep. The Gaul barely blocked it in time. Spartacus followed up with three dazzling chops aimed first at the man's head, then at his waist, then at his thigh.

The Gaul sparred cautiously. Spartacus had expended precious strength. But it was necessary to prove his prowess. The Gaul had a taste of the skill that had slain a hundred men. He didn't like it. But he countered gamely as Spartacus was content to assume the defensive.

This gave the Spartan a chance to study his opponent's technique.

The Gaul favored a fast overhand stroke rich with power. The intent was obvious. To smash the shield a solid blow. A few would paralyze the shield arm. Spartacus knew that. He deflected each cut; diverted some to earth, others above his head. The Gaul had a nice recovery.

The stands fell silent. The Empress hugged her breast and kept biting her lips. Even the Emperor, who knew nothing of the jewels, sat on the edge of his seat. The crowd seemed to sense in Spartacus's actions the drama and tragedy of this combat. Only the metallic clatter of sword on shield filled the air.

Then Spartacus brought the crowd to their feet with an amazing display of mixed overhand and side blows that made his shining sword seem everywhere about the Gaul. He ended the sally with a dexterous upcut aimed between the

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man's legs. The blow was adroitly blocked. Good sword play that!

But the Gaul had retreated. Spartacus pressed his advantage with a sudden lunge. The sword point struck the Gaul's metal girdle and slithered up to his naked chest. It drew blood. The crowd roared. But Spartacus was not deceived. A mere prick. He followed through with a difficult reverse stroke at the Gaul's sword side. The Gaul barely managed to block with his sword hilt. Even so the blow grazed his right side. More blood. The crowd was in a frenzy now.

Then the Gaul opened up with an attack that sickened Spartacus. He still favored the overhand stroke but Spartacus was no longer able to deflect them. The Gaul had cunningly observed the precise tilt of his opponent's shield. He altered his straight stroke to a fast arc that was catching the shield solidly.

SPARTACUS'S shield arm was numbing. Slowly it lowered. But he was still blocking. Sparks flew from metal. He tried to deflect a blow upward above his head. It was a mistake. He knew that his shield was too low, the instant the Gaul's sword struck.

The blow slithered from the shield and ploughed into the softer metal of Spartacus's helmet. Fear seized him. He wavered. Blood was coursing down his neck. Somehow he managed to block the next blow. But the one after that caught him off balance. He tripped and fell to one knee. Just in time he jerked the shield over his head. The down-rushing sword struck solidly. Spartacus's spine bent like a twig. He couldn't get up! Panic seized him.

A groan came from the crowd. Spartacus awaited the end.

But the Gaul, having tasted his op-

ponent's skill, was cautious. He feared a sham and backed a step away. Spartacus's strength returned. He could have gotten up, but he didn't. A clever plan shot through his brain.

Would the Gaul use both hands in wielding the sword for the final blow that would lop off Spartacus's head?

He did!

Assured that the Spartan was indeed unable to get up, the Gaul dropped his shield, took the sword in both hands, and lowered it behind his back. It was the moment Spartacus had prayed for!

With incredible speed, the Spartan's sword shot out in a wide semi-circle some six inches above the ground! The Gaul tried to jump away. Too late! The sharp steel chopped through his left ankle, slowed little, then struck off his right foot. The Gaul fell screaming. Spartacus jumped to his feet. The bloody sword dropped behind his back. It flashed a great arc in the sunlight.

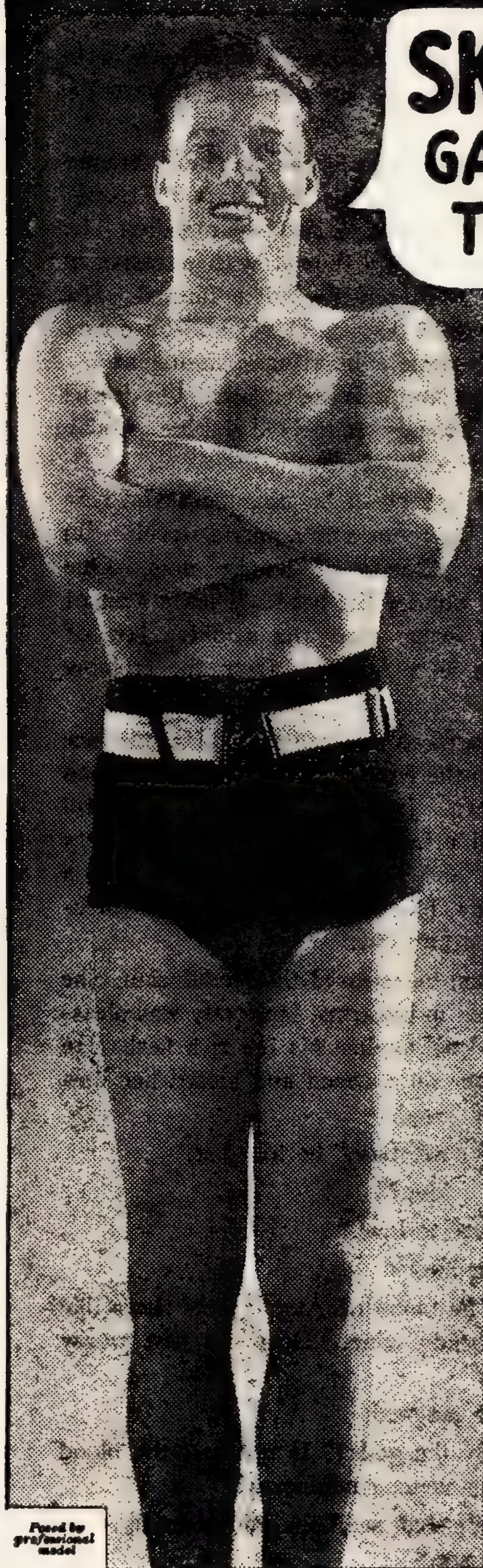
The Gaul's head was severed at the neck. So great was the impact that the head rolled dismally away. The severed neck spurted twin streams of blood; pulsating blood diminishing in pressure and volume.

Spartacus ran to the dressing rooms. Joseph was there. He tugged off the helmet and let the Judean slap an already prepared bandage on the wound. Then he raced to the street. Julian's guards were too amazed to stop him.

OUTSIDE, Aristius was holding the gray Arabs. The Spartan leaped to the chariot. They were off like the wind with the roar of the crowd in their ears like distant thunder. The two men exchanged a handshake more eloquent than words.

"The death of Julian wilt not be

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probed," said Aristius. "The Empress so promises."

Spartacus said nothing. Soon they clattered into the court yard of the villa. Hoofs drew sparks from the stones as they skidded to a stop. As Aristius held the rearing Arabs, Spartacus sprinted to the villa.

He raced to the great room and stopped short. The Andalusian had been tied to the wall and in front of her swayed the gloating Julian. Only an expanse of cloth at the groin covered her. In the hot light her thighs gave off a rich brown lustre as the firm, taut skin held a mirror-like sheen. Her ripe breasts were starkly protruding and the upward and outward position of her arms had drawn them out and upward to form a deep valley between their lofty heights. Glossy black hair spilled about one boneless shoulder to glisten hotly against the smooth golden flesh. It was a glorious sight—save for Julian.

The Roman's eyes were avid, eager, bestial. He could barely control his frenzy of passion.

SPARTACUS uttered an animal cry of rage and in five great strides had caught the hapless Julian by the nape of the neck. The Roman paled and began to whimper like a whipped puppy. Spartacus knocked him to the floor where he lay slobbering with fear; his pig's eyes glazed and dilated.

"Thou diest!" yelled Spartacus, "a death deserving the deaths thou hast wrought. A hundred ravished maidens wilt this day be avenged."

But how? Then the warmth of the room caused Spartacus to smile. Stopping, he jerked the Roman to his feet, twisted his arm and obtained a paralyz-

ing grip on the nape of his neck. He forced the Roman forward—toward the couches.

Julian screamed and fought. A brazier of red hot coals was drawing closer. Soon the smoke struck their bodies. The Spartan's arm shoved with a resistless power. Mercifully Julian fainted. His head went down. Down and on down. There came a horrifying hissing as his nose ground into the embers. On down! The hissing redoubled. Blue smoke curled ceilingward.

The stench of burning flesh and hair filled the room with a putrid stench. On down. Clouds of smoke now. One could not see the head. Then a gust of wind swept away the smoke. Jets of steam were spurting from the crisping ears.

Spartacus released him. He fell face up on the floor. He was dead. He had no face. Just a charred black hole still smouldering. Blood oozed, met the fiery flesh, and turned to steam. It was a ghastly, blood-chilling sight. Spartacus turned him over.

Then he released the Andalusian. She fainted in his arms. Her body was pleasantly cool against his feverish flesh. He put her on a couch and kissed her lips. She revived.

"We art free," he told her.

"To love?"

"Aye to love."

She smiled.

"The blood of Andalusians flows like hot beady wine. Does not that worry thee?"

He laughed.

"By the gods! Is not half the blood in my veins Andalusian?"

"We shalt see," she said dreamily, "we shalt see."

AND her eyes became pools of desire and the majesty of her breasts rose in their full glory as she inhaled deeply. Spartacus's mouth watered at the lusciousness of her lips. Her loveliness was a magnet; drawing him closer and closer.

When Aristius came in, he gave one startled look and tip-toed from the place. In the heart of Rome his own wife would be rising from her bath her perfect body dripping rose-scented water. The vision was enchanting—and he remembered he must be the first to acquaint her of the news of Julian's death.

How far was it? Would there be time?

The whip cracked over the heads of the gray Arabs. Sparks flew beneath flailing hoofs. The chariot slewed through the gates on one wheel. Manes came back in the wind like battle flags.

Aristius was to surpass his record at the Circus Maximus.

The Dragon of Kao Tsu

[Continued from page 15]

Lal and a pirate like me—it would ruin any debutante. Best thing you can do is to get out of Singapore as quick as you can. Ahmed won't forget this. He'll work under cover to get us, if he can. I ain't afraid of him, but you better take the first ship back to the U.S.A."

"But I've got to have that dragon!" She was almost frantic.

Then her eyes dilated as he took something from his pocket—an ivory dragon, not so yellow nor so exquisite as the other she had seen.

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Mr. Wm. F. Lee, Washington, D. C. states in letter the Prosager is mild: "I would not be without it." Mr. Wm. F. Lemon, San Francisco, California, writes: "After using the Prosager I am well again and feel none of the symptoms of Prostate Trouble."

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"The Kao Tsu dragon!" She snatched at it, but he withheld it.

"You wait a minute!" He fumbled with the pot-belly for a moment, and then a section of it swung open. He drew out a strip of parchment, which had been rolled in the interior. One end remained fastened in the belly. The parchment was covered with tiny Chinese characters.

"Then you knew!" She was considerably agitated.

"I knew you wasn't any art collector, and I found out that the dragon Ram Lal gave me for you was the genuine Kao Tsu. So I did some sleuthin' and found out plenty. You wanted this for your old man, and he sent you after it because you're smarter than anybody workin' for him.

"That writin' is an agreement signed by the Chinese war-lord they call General Kai, givin' your old man an option on an important oil concession. He gave it to your old man a few years ago, in a moment of generosity, and like a Chinaman, rigged the agreement up in the belly of this dragon, which is a clever copy of the original Kao Tsu. Your old man thought all the time it *was* the Kao Tsu, and that's what you come after.

"BECAUSE a few months ago your old man decided to develop that concession so's to recoup his stock market losses, but General Kai had changed his mind. He wanted to give that concession to another firm. But if he refused, in the teeth of his own signed agreement, he'd lose face. So he had it stolen from your old man, meanin' to destroy the agreement and then claim he never made it, but Shareef Ahmed, who

don't overlook many bets, had it stolen from Kai's agent. He already had the original Kao Tsu.

"Then Ahmed offered it to the highest bidder. Your old man had lost so much money in the stock market crash he was afraid General Kai would outbid him, so he sent you to steal it. General Kai also had his agents after it, Bull Davies bein' one of 'em. Ram Lal stole both dragons. He gave you the real Kao Tsu, but he kept the one with the contract in it, and was goin' to sell it to General Kai's agent. You know the rest."

"But the dragon—" she exclaimed bewilderedly. "That one, I mean!"

"Easy!" he grinned. "Jum Chin had it all the time. He killed Ram Lal and must have found the dragon on him before Ahmed got there. Ahmed trusts Jum Chin so it didn't occur to him to suspect him. An Arab's no match for a Chinaman in wits. I found it on Jum Chin when I searched him. He won't dare tell Ahmed we've got it because that'd betray his own treachery. I sneaked back when they quit chasin' me and was waitin' outside for a break. Well, I got it."

"Give the dragon to me!" she exclaimed. "It's mine! I paid you!"

"You paid me for the genuine Kao Tsu," he said, his eyes devouring a sleek thigh the sarong left bare. "You got it. This comes extra."

"How much?" she demanded sulkily.

"Money ain't everything," he suggested.

Suddenly she smiled meltingly and came up to him, laying a slender hand on his arm. Her nearness made him dizzy, and she did not resist as he passed an arm about her waist.

"I understand," she breathed. "You

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win. Give me the dragon first, though."

Trustingly he placed it in her hand—and quick as a cat she plucked the pistol from his belt and smashed him over the head with the barrel. The next instant she was streaking for the door. But she underestimated the strength of his skull. To her dismay he did not fall. He staggered with a gasping curse, then righted himself and leaped after her. He caught her as she grasped the knob, slapped the pistol out of her hand and spun her back into the room, crushing her wrists in one hand as she tried to claw his eyes out.

"You little cheat!" he snarled. "You've never kept a bargain yet! Well, you're goin' to keep this one! You've got what you want, and I'm goin' to get what I want! And you can't squawk, because you can't have the world know-in' about this night's work!"

Knowledge that this was true pepped up her struggles, but to her dismay she found them useless against the strength of her irate captor. All her kicking and squirming accomplished was to disarrange the sarong, and he caught his breath at the sight of all the pink and white curves displayed.

"You don't dare!" she gasped, as he drew her roughly to him. "You don't dare—"

Bill Clanton didn't even bother to reply to her ridiculous assertion

IT WAS some time later when he grinned at her philosophically. He stooped and kissed her pouting mouth. "Maybe that'll teach you not to associate with people like me," he said.

Her reply was unprintable, but the look in her eyes contradicted her words as she took his arm and together they went out to the street.

VALLEY OF BLOOD

[Continued from page 77]

is this young lady? She will not talk to me."

Jim explained, and the Dutchman's eyes opened wide. "So the daughter was not massacred, and she kept her all these years alive," he said. "Well, it is a fortunate thing all around."

"But how did you get here? How did you find the pass?" Jim asked.

Van Stent laughed. "When you left your coat behind you, I took the liberty of going through your pockets, and I found this," he answered. "So I took my men by plane to the foot of the pass, and then we come up—just in time."

And he held up in front of Jim's eyes the leaf with the message and the map.

Jim made some murmur of understanding. Van Stent got up and moved away. Perhaps he understood that look in Jim's eyes as he looked at Mary Alice.

He drew her to him, felt her rounded breasts against his chest, and heard the quick thudding of her heart. "My wife—my little wife!" he whispered.

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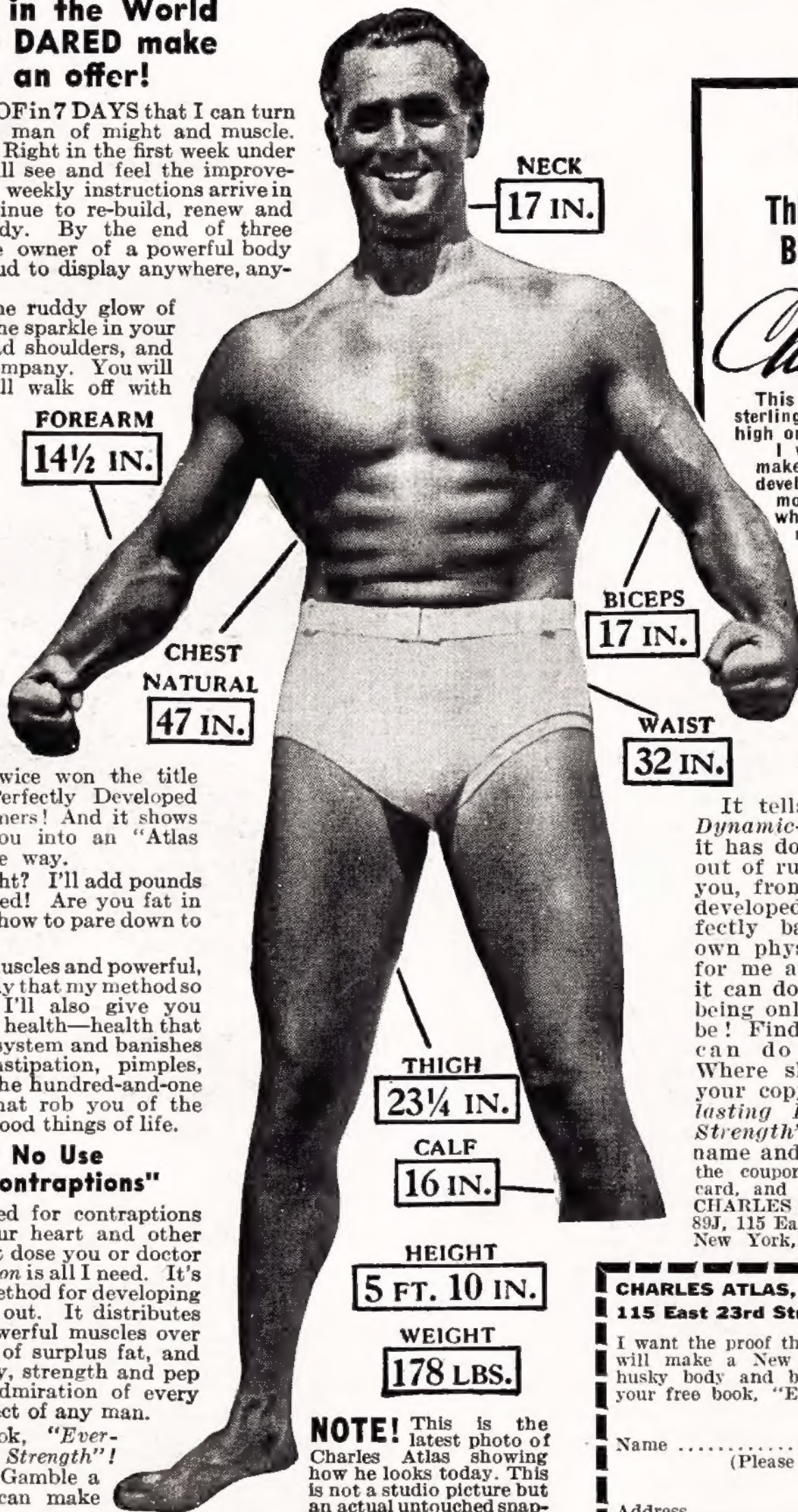
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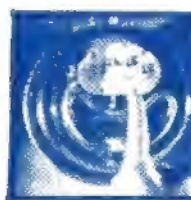
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